

B"H

COLLECTION

OF

ESSAYS

ON JUDAISM

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INTRODUCTION

With praise to the Almighty, I am publishing a collection of articles and essays I have written over the years on an assortment of topics ranging from a woman's covering of her hair in Kabbalah and a response to some anti-Semitic challenges to the Talmud.

Some of the essays cover some basic aspects of Judaism while others seek to delve more deeply into Jewish thought. Some were written in response to tragedies such as 9/11, but I believe their message is still relevant today until such time when all evil will be eradicated from the Earth and we will no longer know of any sorrow.

Some of these essays were published in various publications and some were based on lectures I delivered over the years.

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It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to a better and deeper understanding of Jewish values and thought and will ultimately hasten the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption, at which time “the Earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea is covered with water.”

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Buffalo, New York

ESSAY ONE

**THE SHAMMAI-HILLEL
APPROACH TO
TOLERANCE AND LOVE**

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ESSAY ONE

THE SHAMMAI-HILLEL APPROACH TO TOLERANCE AND LOVE

Who's not for tolerance, unity and love? Yet, the more we seem to be talking about these ideals, the more splintered and fractured we become as a society. After all, we are all so different. So many opinions, so many personality clashes that these goals seem to be as elusive as ever. To assist us with an understanding of Judaism's approach to unity, most students of the twin themes of Torah and unity would refer us to the famous Talmudic story of Hillel and the convert. A prospective convert comes to the great Sage Shammai with the demand that he should convert him with the stipulation that he teach him the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Shammai quickly evicts him with the builder's yardstick in his hand. When the same man comes before Hillel, Hillel graciously accepts him, and acquiesces to his request: "What is hateful to you don't do to your fellow,

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this is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary. Go learn the rest.”

Ironically, one could argue that it is from Shammai that we can gain a better understanding of Judaism’s view of unity and the means to implement it. Indeed, a better understanding of Shammai’s perspective on tolerance will shed light on and magnify Hille’s contribution to the art and science of tolerance and unity as well.

In *Ethics of the Fathers* (Chapter one) Shammai is quoted as saying, “Greet everyone with a cheerful countenance.” This statement affords us a rather different view of Shammai that goes against the simplistic image of him as an intolerant individual. How do we reconcile this statement with his eviction of the potential convert from his house?

In truth, Shammai does not say simply that we should greet everyone with a cheerful countenance; he says something far more profound that is preserved in the literal translation of the Hebrew words “Kol HaAdam” that is usually rendered “everyone: “Greet the *entire person* with a cheerful countenance.”

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When we look at one part of an individual, we can easily define that person by that specific characteristic, belief or practice with which we strongly disagree. Even when we agree with that person's action or viewpoint and greet him/her accordingly, our acceptance of that person is limited, because it is commensurate with the degree to which our views concur. Total and genuine acceptance of another person can only happen, Shammai seems to be telling us, when we look at the entire individual. Then, we are exposed to the most beautiful of G-d's creatures, one that was created in the image of G-d.

Shammai's message is thus: No matter how the person behaves, no matter what are his views, greet the person with a cheerful countenance, because you must look at the totality of that person. Shammai's lack of tolerance was not directed at the prospective convert, but at his ludicrous and denigrating view of Judaism. To greet him then with a cheerful countenance, Shammai thought, would give the wannabe convert the erroneous impression that his caricature of Judaism was authentic. Shammai was critical and intolerant of the prospective

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convert's **words**, because of their implied disparagement of Judaism. To underscore that his was not a personal animosity, Shammai, therefore, used a measuring stick to evict him. Shammai was simply showing his visitor that his demands did not measure up with the standards of Torah one must have in order to convert.

In Shammai's philosophy, true unity and tolerance is not antithetical to maintaining strict standards. Shammai was assuredly as loath to compromise the standards of tolerance and unity as he was loath to compromise the standards of Torah. To effect unity by compromising one's principles, is a sign that the unity is at best a superficial one. It is a statement that one's ability to accept another person is predicated on the watering down of our values and beliefs. And since, we will always find points to disagree about; true unity would always elude us. Ultimate unity and love is expressed when one loves his or her fellow not because s/he is perfect or agrees with my beliefs, but because s/he is endowed with a special soul that is Divine and transcends their flaws and even their virtues. Shammai therefore

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declares: Greet everyone with a cheerful countenance by looking at the **totality** of their being, not the degree to which they match our ideals and beliefs.

Hillel, undoubtedly agreed with Shammai's non-compromising stance. One may never compromise on a principle. Hillel says so much in his famous dictum recorded in Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter one): Love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah." He emphasized, "bring them close to the torah," and not "compromise the integrity of Torah so that you can bring it down to their level." Yet, he accepted the convert who appeared to have been asking for a watered down Judaism.

But herein lies the greatness of Hillel, whose name is etymologically connected to the word light. While Shammai, his rigid devotion to truth and principle notwithstanding, saw beneath the surface of the **personalities** and was able to separate between their flaws and their pure essence, Hillel was able to extend that to the statements and actions of each and every individual as well. Hillel searched beneath the surface of this convert's apparent barb directed at Judaism. He applied his spiritual sonar to

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hear what was really being said. And Hillel was able to detect that deep down there was a pure and holy desire. The irreverent demand to teach him the whole Torah on one foot was only the veneer that belied a much more profound and sincere embrace of Judaism. To remove even that surface resistance to the truth, Hillel employed the path of love and acceptance as he guided the convert on the right path. In Hillel's approach, one can elicit the inner purity of the soul through tolerance, warmth and expressions of love.

In the final analysis, Both Shammai and Hillel respected, accepted and loved everyone despite their shortcomings. Both Shammai and Hillel would never countenance the compromising of one iota of Torah. The difference between Shammai and Hillel was that Shammai separated people from their views; he accepted people while rejecting their erroneous ideas. Hillel was able to find a spark of positive energy even in words that do not appear to be so positive, and he sought to elicit the true inner desires of the soul through warmth and acceptance.

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In conclusion, the invaluable lessons we can learn from both Shammai and Hillel for our fragmented Jewish community are threefold. For unity to be genuine, it must include three elements:

(a) An acceptance of others even if we totally disagree with them, because of the recognition that there is much more to the person than that which is expressed in their views and behavior.

(b) True unity does not require that we agree or even respect each other's **views**. To generate true unity we do not have to compromise one iota of Torah principles. We accept the totality of the individual even if we cannot accept his/her values. And this is true even in Shammai's philosophy.

(c) But, even when we have to disagree with someone's values and opinions because they contradict the Torah, rather than impugning their motives and denigrating them, we should follow Hillel's example and attribute their misguided words to an inability to articulate their G-dly soul's true desire. While never misrepresenting Torah's values to them, we

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must enable them to appreciate their own innate spiritual nature that certainly wants to do that which is G-dly and right. The way to achieve this realization, especially in our day and age, is primarily through love and devotion.

ESSAY TWO
RESPONSE TO 911

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ESSAY TWO

RESPONSE TO 911

Our minds and hearts have been numbed.

We have all become victims of history's most heinous terrorists act.

We are now grieving for the horrendous loss of precious life. And at this time so many questions plague us. But, it is the one question that stands head and shoulders above all others that every thinking and feeling person asks in one form or another.

Why?

How could this unspeakable atrocity have occurred?

Why did G-d allow this to happen?

Truth be told, most of us do **not** want to hear a philosophical explanation for this catastrophe. What appears to be a question is actually our way of expressing feelings of pain and anguish.

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What we do want is for G-d to take us into His embrace and comfort us. The question is a thinly veiled way of asking for Moshiach and Redemption; a time that is characterized by the manifestation of G-d's presence in this world; when evil will be relegated to the history books.

Insofar as the philosophical question is concerned, we must admit that there can be no rational explanation that we will accept. And we must also come to the realization that we cannot possibly understand G-d's ways. Providentially, the Torah reading of this week's Parsha that coincided with the day of the attack states: "The hidden matters are for G-d our G-d."

Nevertheless, in light of the Ba'al Shem Tov's teaching that everything that we hear or see must serve as a lesson for us, we must seek to answer one question -- particularly as this event occurred at the juncture between the "old" year 5761 and the new year 5762.

The question is:

What should be **our** response to all of this?

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Indeed, it appears that there are several key responses as to what we should and should not do.

First, we cannot and must not despair!

For us to despair is to give the forces of evil the victory they desire.

And in truth there is no reason to despair. For while the forces of unmitigated evil have wreaked havoc on the bodies and buildings of thousands of Americans; evil cannot and will not destroy the spirit of our nation and the souls of its victims.

And because this was evil's unprecedented attempt at destroying our nation and indeed the civilized world, we must do everything to respond to that evil by unprecedented acts of goodness and holiness. To be sure, those who can assist with the rescue effort should assist, those who can give blood should give, those who can comfort the relatives of those who were lost should, by all means, do it.

But, I suspect, that much more is expected of us at this time.

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To appreciate what it is that is demanded of us we must not delude ourselves. This is war! And we must all mobilize ourselves to fight this evil by doing unprecedented good.

As Jews, however, we cannot stop and be content with general acts of goodness. We must do that and more. For this assault, though directed against the U.S. and civilization the way we know it, was also intended to hurt the Jewish people and the Land of Israel in particular.

And if the attack was against our Jewishness, we must also respond resoundingly by an increase in our Jewishness. More Torah study, more observance of the commandments, more Tzedakah, more support of Jewish educational institutions, etc.

And while we cannot possibly make sense of this colossal tragedy; we must realize that it was part of evil's last stand against the forces of goodness and holiness before the onset of the Redemption through Moshiach.

Maimonides formulated the Thirteen Principles of Faith that form the foundation of Judaism. One of these principles is to believe that

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Moshiach — a human Jewish leader steeped in Torah knowledge and deeply committed to the practice of Judaism — will, with G-d's help, of course, usher in an age of peace that will also involve the return of all Jews to the Land of Israel.

However, the road to this age of peace has been a rocky one, punctuated with millennia of hardship and persecution for the Jewish people. Our Sages of old, based on Biblical texts, have also informed us that the final struggle that we will have to endure will involve the struggle for Jerusalem.

Recent events have made it clear that the world is at a crossroad. One direction is the direction of the forces of hatred and evil and the other is a world of holiness and peace. Part of the process of bringing about the Redemption is to believe in it, anticipate it, yearn for it and live in accordance with its goals.

Indeed, many have publicized prophetic statements made by our Sages in the Midrash and Zohar that speak of an attack of Arabs against a great city in which large towers and buildings will be toppled. All of these

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tumultuous events, the Midrash and Zohar conclude, are a prelude to the coming of Moshiach.

As valid as these prophecies are, exactly ten years ago, our generation has heard an explicit prophecy concerning the imminence of Moshiach's arrival. In an unprecedented statement, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, invoking the power of prophecy, proclaimed that Moshiach's coming is imminent! The Rebbe asked that this message be publicized throughout the world.

Returning to the question of why, the truth be stated, most of us do **not** want to hear a philosophical explanation for this catastrophe. What we do want is for G-d to take us into His embrace and comfort us. This will happen when Moshiach will come imminently and allow G-d's presence in this world to become manifest and the evil will be relegated to the history books.

However, as we await this "embrace" we must do our part by embracing one another (figuratively and where appropriate literally) and embracing our G-d, His Torah and Mitzvot.

In the opening words of this week's Parsha:

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“All of you today (a reference to Rosh Hashanah) stand firmly before G-d Your G-d, your leaders... every Jewish person.”

We stand firmly and will prevail when we all stand together as **one people**, with the realization that we have **one G-d**, whose teachings of the **one Torah** we follow.

May we all be inscribed and sealed for a good and sweet year!

Where was G-d during the holocaust? How could let it happen? How can one believe in a G-d that allowed auschwitz? These and similar sounding questions are some of the most painful questions that have ever been asked; questions for which no satisfying answers have been given. And if we posit that there can be no answer to this question, then we must ask ourselves, should we continue to ask the question over and over again just to be told that we cannot fathom the unfathomable? What positive outcome can there be from the experience of frustration that we have when we reach this theological impasse?

To help us deal with this issue, i think it is imperative that we define the question, or, to be

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more precise, the various shades of the question. It appears to me that there are at least five different shades to the question. The first two are not really questions but emotional expressions. Of the latter three “intellectual” shades, there are good satisfying answers to the first two, but alas, it is the third intellectual question that must remain unanswered. But, by leaving that shade of the question unanswered, it compels us to then once more resort to asking the emotional shade of the question, to which only G-d can respond.

Let us define the first two forms of the question that we labeled “emotional.” An emotional question is not really an attempt at seeking certain information as is an intellectual question. Rather it is an adult subterfuge. Instead of breaking down and venting our emotions by crying over the destruction of Jewry during the holocaust, we express our pain and anguish with a more adult looking question: where were you during the holocaust? This is not a question that begs an intellectual answer. This is the child in us who cries to his mother when he hurts himself and does not seek a

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rational explanation for his pain, but a kiss and warm caress from his mother.

Instead of expressing one guilt feelings for less than adequate behavior or faith, one couches the guilt in a question by asking “why should i believe in G-d, if he permitted the holocaust to occur?” This individual – whose guilt we all share in some measure – does not want an answer to his question. Any answer that would make sense would only enhance the feelings of guilt for not having sufficient faith in and commitment to g-d. By faulting G-d we find some justification for our own actions.

This individual needs to be told that, there is no need to feel guilty. You do believe. Your heart is open and receptive to g-d and his commandments. If not, you wouldn't be feeling this guilt. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. When one ceases to feel pain it is a dangerous sign of paralysis. Guilt is the sign that there is a sense of keen sensitivity to G-d. To question G-d – in whatever form – is a sign that g-d exists in some degree within the hearts and minds of those who question. When the guilty will be told that they need not feel guilt, but that they could assuage their guilt by

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enabling their hungry souls to imbibe the G-dly spirits of Torah and Mitzvot, these emotional outburst will no longer be necessary.

But there are legitimate forms of the question. The first “philosophical” challenge to belief in G-d goes something like this: How could there be a G-d if the Holocaust occurred?

This question can be answered quite easily. If G-d would be defined as one who does not allow the Holocaust to occur, then its occurrence would dispute His existence. But, in the Jewish tradition of G-d, G-d does leave room for suffering and Holocaust. All one has to do is to peruse the Biblical and Talmudic literature for numerous references to these horrific events that were predicted.

The second version is somewhat more sophisticated. Although it can be broken into several parts, its central message goes like this? What was G-d’s role in the Holocaust? Or more colloquially: Where was G-d during the Holocaust? This question can be answered in many ways. I will mention only one, the one that I heard from hundreds of Holocaust survivors. “G-d was with me.” “The mere fact

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that I was able to survive, against all odds, demonstrates that G-d was at my side all the time, making events happen so that I could go free.”

Our problem begins with the third and final form of the intellectual question. It can be phrased independently, or it can come as a follow up question to the preceding one. Let us use this form of the question here. “If G-d was with you and saved you, why did He not do the same to the millions of other innocent people? Why did He let little babies be burnt and shot by the German monsters? Why didn’t G-d intervene?”

All attempts at finding answers to this question that can satisfy any thinking person has been futile. Only people who want to be religious and feel some discomfort because of the Holocaust can be prepared to accept a rationalization that would justify the horrific events of the Holocaust. To them I say, there is nothing wrong with the discomfort you feel knowing that the Holocaust happened.

I will not go through the many attempts at finding reason in an area that is clearly beyond

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reason. I will propose that when we reach this impasse it is the signal to us to revert to the emotional form of the question, which is our expression of pain and anguish. It is also is not so subtle a request, nay a demand of our Heavenly Father to take us into His embrace and bring an end to all pain and suffering, by bringing us Moshiach and the Redemption.

Only in the Messianic Age, that is characterized in Jewish mystical literature as the age when the impossible will be come possible, the transcendent will become immanent, the Supra-rational will become rational and the overwhelming forces will become internalized. will it be possible for us to fathom the unfathomable. By repeatedly asking the question and then realizing that there is no answer we are compelled to cry out "*Ad Masi*-How much longer?" How much longer does the world have to endure irrational suffering? This prayer, demand and protest is music to G-d ears and "compels" Him to take charge as the Conductor of the ultimate Symphony that will make all the disparate cacophonous sounds blend into beautiful harmony.

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At that time, the prophet declares – and only then – we will be able to say and sing: “I thank you G-d for having chastised me.” (Isaiah).

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ESSAY THREE
SHOULD WE LAUGH OR
CRY?

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ESSAY THREE

SHOULD WE LAUGH OR CRY?

Mourning and sadness are not the most natural Jewish feelings. How do we relate to Judaism's saddest period of the year, the period beginning with the Seventeenth of Tammuz and culminates with Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy temples?

One of the most poignant stories recounted by our Talmudic sages sheds light on the way we should relate to this period.

The illustrious sage, Rabbi Akiva was traveling with his colleagues. "When they came to the Temple Mount they saw a fox emerging from the [ruins of the] Holy of Holies [of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem], they started to weep, but Rabbi Akiva laughed."

Astonished at Rabbi Akiva's bizarre reaction to a most troubling spectacle, they queried him: "Why are you laughing?"

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Rabbi Akiva's responded by referring to the prophet Isaiah who linked the prophecies of Uriah who prophesied about the destruction of the first Temple, and Zecharya who prophesied during the era of the Second Temple, as if they were contemporaries. What connection is there between these two -historically speaking - remote individuals?

The connection, Rabbi Akiva, explains is that the first prophet spoke of the utter devastation to be visited upon the Temple, while the other spoke of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. As long as I didn't see the fulfillment of the first prophecy of doom materialize before my eyes, I was not assured of the realization of the second prophecy of hope and rebuilding.. Now that I've seen the prophecy of destruction come to life, I am assured that the second prophecy of hope will likewise come to fruition. (Talmud, end of Makkot).

An obvious question arises. How is it that a man the caliber of Rabbi Akiva should have harbored doubts as to whether the prophecy concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple would come true? Why did he need

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confirmation of the “good” prophecies from the fulfillment of the “bad” ones?

In truth, Rabbi Akiva, had no doubts about any of the prophecies. He knew that if G-d had said, through his prophet, that the Jews would return to the Land of Israel, they certainly would. If we were told by the prophet that the Temple would be rebuilt, we were confident – and, certainly, Rabbi Akiva was confident – that it would come to pass. Rabbi Akiva’s concern was, however, to what extent the prophecy of hope would materialize. How magnificent will be the return to Zion.

In a world of relative values, a little suffering is far better than much suffering. Jews, in returning to the Land of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital and a rebuilt Holy Temple, would enjoy security, peace and self-respect. That is certainly preferable to a life of misery and suffering.

Rabbi Akiva’s question, therefore, was: are the Messianic predictions – that will soon come to fruition – going to be good only in contrast to the misery we have experienced throughout our exile. From that vantage point, any good we will

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have is better than what we have presently. But, if the Jewish people were to suffer so harshly, to anticipate only the relative goodness and happiness in the future, they would hardly feel consoled. It certainly would not call for any expression of joy while their suffering is acute. If all we had to look forward to was some marginal respite from the horrors of the past, no positive emotions could have been evoked.

But, when Rabbi Akiva realized that G-d placed the two prophecies together - the prophecy of destruction and the prophecy of rebuilding - it was to demonstrate that the magnitude of the good we will experience will be commensurate with the magnitude of the evil. It will be pure, unmitigated good, just as the evil and misery was horrific in the extreme. Now that Rabbi Akiva saw how utterly devastating the destruction of the Temple was, he knew with utmost certainty that the era of Redemption, with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, will, likewise, be so utterly great; the good will be absolute and intrinsic, not just partial and relative.

Our century has experienced that which no century before us has. We are now barely one

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half century after the greatest destruction of Jewry in history - the Holocaust. For over seventy years, millions of Jews experienced ruthless and persistent oppression in the Soviet Union. We had to endure wars of survival against those Arab armies who sought to drive us into the sea. And we are still plagued with terrorist bombings.

On the spiritual side, our century – like no other period in history – sustained a loss of millions by way of a tidal wave of assimilation, deterioration of Jewish knowledge and commitment to Judaism. Millions of Jews have lost their ties with their G-d, Torah and people in an unprecedented fashion; and millions more are now threatened with extinction. We can hardly imagine an exile so harsh and extreme in the negative side.

But, precisely because of our collective negative experience, in the spirit of Rabbi Akiva's realization, we now know that the return of the Jewish nation to Zion, the rebuilding of the Temple, the emergence of true peace in the world, i.e., the Messianic Age of Redemption that we've been praying for thousands of years,

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will be so utterly magnificent and complete in the extreme.

This awareness of the imminent happiness, compels us to feel an inner feeling of joy, even as we must outwardly observe the laws of mourning during this period of Three Weeks, as long as the Redemption is not complete. Our anticipation of a bright future, gives us confidence and enthusiasm now, to march forward, in transforming our little world as well as the world around us into a Redemption oriented world.

Our generation has the added qualification. The Rebbe has told us in no uncertain terms that “The time of your Redemption has arrived,” and that our task is to “open our eyes to this new reality.” In the simplest of terms, this awareness, joy and excitement at the prospects of the near future, must enhance our commitment to Jewish learning and practice and an increased preparedness for the imminent Redemption!

ESSAY FOUR
THE REBBE AND
LIBERATION:
LIBERATION ON ALL
FRONTS

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ESSAY FOUR

The Rebbe and Liberation: Liberation on all Fronts

The Rebbe's birthday on the 11th of Nissan coincides with the Festival of Passover, the Season of our Freedom.

It is therefore not surprising to find the thread of liberation run through the entire fabric of the Rebbe's philosophy and life.

For the Rebbe, liberation extends to helping those who are literally in prison even as it encompassed heroic efforts to liberate Jews from the former Soviet Union. But, above all, the Rebbe's life was dedicated to the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption of the Jewish people and the entire world from *galut/exile*.

All of these areas of liberation are more or less familiar to the Jewish people. Much less is known about the Rebbe's emphasis on liberating ourselves from our "*galut pnimi*"-

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“inner exile.” And although the Rebbe placed such a great emphasis on the Mitzvah campaigns and outreach, he also devoted hundreds of his talks and published Chassidic discourses to the inner dynamics of the soul.

In the historic talk delivered on the 28th of Nissan 5751—eleven months before suffering a stroke—the Rebbe spoke of how he had done all he could to bring the Redemption. What is now needed, the Rebbe continued, was to extricate ourselves from our internal exile.

A person can enjoy freedom to practice Judaism and still be locked up in a spiritually debilitating prison who fails to unlock and unleash his or her spiritual potential. A Jew who has a galut/exile mentality is as much in need of liberation as the Jew in the Soviet Gulag or the inmate in a Western prison. Galut tainted and jades ways of viewing life can be as debilitating as barbed wire and iron bars. Obviously, the physical suffering and oppression is much harsher and far more painful. But while their bodies were tortured, the souls of many a Jew in the Gulag could never be extinguished.

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To be sure, living in a free country is one of the greatest blessings G-d has bestowed upon us. But the reason it is a blessing is because of its unlimited **opportunities** to realize our spiritual potential. Not taking advantage of this blessing is the equivalent of a freed prisoner who subjects himself to the same indignities of prison life.

The Rebbe went beyond advocating the need for us to get out of the self-imposed galut/prison. Even the tzadik who serves G-d with all his energy, the Rebbe explained, can also be in Mitzraim; Hebrew for Egypt, but it actually connotes the state of being confined. When a Jew allows himself or herself to stagnate and does not attempt to break out of the mold—albeit a good and holy mold—they are still within Mitzraim.

The Exodus from Egypt, in the Rebbe's world, entails the drive to break out of all boundaries; including the boundaries and parameters of goodness. The true meaning of Passover is not limited to "passing over", transcending and surmounting all of the obstacles in our path towards Sinai and Redemption. We must also rise above and go beyond the positive

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conventions and niches we carved out for ourselves, notwithstanding the fact that only a day earlier our actions were deemed noble and have elicited praise and admiration.

Liberating ourselves from ourselves encapsulates the Rebbe's thought and life; it is the essence of Passover and the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE
THE REBBE!

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ESSAY FIVE

THE REBBE!

Gimmel Tammuz—the third day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz—is the day that created a barrier between the Chassidim and the Rebbe. However, ironically, our inability to physically have contact with the Rebbe has not diminished our desire to maintain our relationship with him. Indeed, the Rebbe’s “absence” has spawned so many different attempts at understanding the deep relationship that exists between the Rebbe and his followers, and indeed, the entire Jewish nation.

In this issue we will attempt to capture one pivotal aspect of the Rebbe’s connection to us that continues to reverberate and resonate with us.

To the “outside” world, the Rebbe is seen as the Jewish leader who sent thousands of dedicated young men and women to all parts of the world, including some far-flung and even

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dangerous locations, for the express purpose of bringing the light of Torah and Mitzvot permeated with Chassidic soul. The Rebbe's message of Judaism permeated with light and joy was brought to the world at large indirectly through his shluchim (emissaries). And it is through these shluchim that the world was made aware of the Rebbe's leadership and concern for every Jew and indeed for all of humanity.

No one can say how many people were affected through his indirect influence. It is likewise impossible to gauge how many lives were saved, how many people were brought back to their roots and how many grew in their Judaism as a result of the Rebbe's outreach. One thing is clear that the number of people affected through the Rebbe's over 3,000 emissaries—and thousands of other chassidim who do the work of the shluchim without the official title and its ripple effect—is astronomical.

What is not as well known, however, is the extent to which the Rebbe **directly** educated, inspired and touched the lives of people from all walks of life.

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If one had to enumerate the Rebbe's method of reaching Jews directly, one could divide it into five categories:

Farbrengens, or Chassidic gatherings, is where the Rebbe would spend hours upon hours expounding many diverse aspects of Jewish knowledge to the thousands who attended these frequent events.

Yechidus or private audiences with the Rebbe, is where the Rebbe would connect to Jews from all walks of life in a very personal way.

Distribution of Jewish items. On many occasions the Rebbe would distribute various Jewish items such as Matzah before Passover , wine after major Jewish Holidays, publications and most famously, dollar bills for tzedakah. Literally tens of thousands of people were the recipients of these items—that were always accompanied with a blessing—over the years.

Correspondence. The Rebbe communicated his ideas, counsel, blessings and guidance to thousands by way of mail and other forms of correspondence. Many of these letters have been collected in close to forty volumes thus far.

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Literary output. There are many Chabad homes that possess a collection of the Rebbe's works (most of which are transcripts of his many talks). This collection (which does not include his correspondence) contains over 200 volumes. The dissemination of these volumes and their translation and adaptations has brought the Rebbe's voluminous and variegated teachings directly to thousands of homes and institutions of learning that helped to shape and mold the way we think.

Farbrengens.

In the course of a year, the Rebbe would gather—thirty (in early years) to about 80 times (in his later years)—with thousands of his Chassidim and others. At these gatherings the Rebbe would deliver profound discourses on a vast array of Torah subjects that included, Biblical exegesis, Talmudic analysis, intricate Kabbalistic and Chassidic thought. He would also discuss current events and issues that confronted the Jewish people from the perspective of Torah. He would also devote much time to underscore the importance of

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Jewish education, highlighting the unique role of women, as well as words of encouragement to all who would listen to expand the frontiers of Judaism.

Some Farbrengens lasted an hour or two and some as long as 8 hours. In between talks—as many as ten on some occasions, each dealing with a different topic—there were many personal encounters people had with the Rebbe. In addition, the people would make a L’chaim (a toast) to the Rebbe, getting very personal responses. In these Farbrengens the Rebbe would combine the deepest intellectual insights with animated singing. To thousands of people it was their most profound spiritual experience. In the later years, some of these weekday Farbrengens were broadcast on cable TV that reached tens of thousands more.

It has been estimated that over the forty plus years the Rebbe conducted these Farbrengens and other public addresses, he devoted over 10,000 hours to stimulating the minds reaching into the minds and hearts of so many.

The late Dr. Tzvi Saks of blessed memory taught at the Daemen College in Buffalo NY.

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The president of the College—a non-Jew—related to Dr. Saks that one night he was surfing the channels on his TV and saw the Rebbe talking. And while he admitted that he did not understand what the Rebbe was saying, the simultaneous translation notwithstanding, he was so mesmerized and inspired by what he saw, that he sat glued to the TV for the next few hours! The effect these Farbrengens had on thousands of Jews and non-Jews is inestimable!

Yechidus:

For the first twenty-five years of his leadership, the Rebbe would receive people in yechidus ("private audience") three times a week.

The audiences, held on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings, would begin shortly after nightfall and extend through the night; some nights, the last of the several hundred visitors would depart well after daybreak. Many had only a few short minutes in the presence of the Rebbe, but all would come away with the feeling that in their time with him, however brief, the Rebbe was with them with his entire

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being, wholly and exclusively focused on their individual concerns.

The number of those seeking the Rebbe's advice and blessing continued to grow; soon, all but the most urgent cases had to wait several months for a yechidus appointment.

Many would describe the yechidus as the most powerful experience in their lives.

The word yechidus signifies a private meeting. But for chassidim, the concept of a yechidus with a Rebbe has a far deeper implication. The word yechidah refers to the highest rung of the soul, the innermost core which is at one with G-d in constant and consummate unity. A yechidus with his Rebbe a one-to-one encounter between the yechidah of the chassid and the yechidah of the Rebbe charges the chassid's yechidah with dynamism, so that it vitalizes his day-to-day conduct.

But by no means was Yechidus reserved for the Chassidim. Jews from all walks of life would come to consult with, seek a blessing and guidance from, the Rebbe. The entire spectrum of Jewish and general life was represented in the thousands of people. Again an estimate: In the

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course of close to thirty years that the Rebbe held these meetings, over 100,000 people were privileged to have a profound personal encounter with the Rebbe in Yechidus. These included, rabbis, prime ministers, government officials, professors, scientists and philosophers, Jewish leaders from all backgrounds and most notably “plain ordinary” Jews for whom the Rebbe’s words of comfort and inspiration changed their lives for the better. Many have pointed out that the Rebbe’s attention to the simplest of Jews was as total, unequivocal and with awesome empathy and love as it was to leaders and dignitaries! Indeed, the word “ordinary” did not exist in the Rebbe’s lexicon.

Distribution of Jewish Items

From the very beginning of the Rebbe’s leadership the Rebbe would distribute blessings (before Rosh Hashanah, wine (after each holiday), Matzah (before Passover), honey cake (before Yom Kippur and on Hoshana Rabbah) and copies of the Tanya and Chassidic discourses (at special occasions). Thousands of people would get on line (the old-fashioned

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meaning of the word) to receive these items from the Rebbe's own hand.

In 1986, the Rebbe began conducting a weekly "receiving line." Each Sunday, the Rebbe would stand in a small room near his office as thousands of men, women and children filed past to see him and receive his blessing. Many used the opportunity to pose a question and receive a word of advice. To each of them the Rebbe gave a dollar bill, appointing them as his personal agent (shaliach) to give it to the charity of their choice.

Why the dollar? The Rebbe explained his custom by quoting his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, who would often say: "When two people meet, something good should result for a third." The Rebbe wished to elevate each of the thousands of encounters of the day to something more than a meeting of two individuals; he wanted that each should involve the performance of a "mitzvah" (good deed), particularly a mitzvah that also benefits another individual.

On a given Sunday, anywhere between 5,000 and 10,000 people would receive that dollar.

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Frequently the Rebbe would repeat the distribution of dollars several times during the week (albeit to a much smaller crowd).

Again, a most amazing phenomenon was reported by all who came for "Sunday Dollars." The Rebbe, well into his ninth decade at the time, would stand for as long as eight hours without interruption. Yet in the few seconds that he or she was with the Rebbe, each visitor felt that the Rebbe was there only for them. It was as though he or she were the only visitor of the day.

Once, a woman could not contain herself and burst out: "Rebbe, how do you do it? How is it that you do not tire?"

The Rebbe smiled and replied: "Every soul is a diamond. Can one grow tired of counting diamonds?"

These encounters were not just perfunctory giving of dollars and a perfunctory blessing. Rather, the people would come away uplifted and motivated to do more good. Stories of miracles and Divine inspiration occurring at these distributions are legendary.

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In addition the distribution of dollars, the Rebbe would—during weekdays—distribute coins to the children on his way to the Mincha service.

Correspondence

One of the Rebbe's direct ways of reaching people was through his prolific and prodigious correspondence. To date over 30 volumes in Hebrew have been published (containing over 11,000 letters) and about 10 volumes in English. Rabbi Sholom Ber Shapiro (the son-in-law of the legendary secretary of the Rebbe, Rabbi Dr. Nissan Mindel) related that his late father-in-law's archives contained about 55,000 letters of the Rebbe, mostly in English! Only a "handful" have been published thus far.

When it became too cumbersome to send formal letters in response to the tens of thousands of people who wrote to the Rebbe for his sage counsel, the Rebbe would write—usually, cryptically, so only the person who wrote the letter would understand—his answer on the margin of the letter of the person who asked for his guidance. In this fashion, the Rebbe was able to guide and bless additional

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tens of thousands of people and relate to their most personal concerns. To this day, Chassidim study his letters for insights on a plethora of subjects and his advice and guidance for virtually every one of life's challenges.

Excerpt from unknown person's insight

In the file where we keep all the important family documents, there is a folder which we open from time to time. The papers in it are aging; some, indeed, are quite yellow, but we refer to it often.

There is a letter my wife received when she was a child, the response to the announcement of our engagement, some advice we received at turning points in our lives, and blessings for our children.

Our interest in the folder is more than sentimental. The answers which the Rebbe gave us in the past serve as guideposts for our present and our future. The advice that he gave us then helps us focus our energies and highlight our individual missions.

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My friends have similar folders, and at times they have allowed me to read some of the letters which they received. Here, I did not have the same degree of personal interest. Nevertheless, the guidance the Rebbe gave them was always eye-opening. I enjoyed seeing how the Rebbe related to the issues they raised and the depth of insight in the answers he gave them.

On occasion, people with whom I share less close ties have shown me letters they received from the Rebbe. I remember a retailer in Manhattan where I purchased some computer equipment, an Israeli army major whom I met on a visit to the base he commanded, and a Jewish communal leader in Cleveland. It was with special feeling - something not unlike the reverence a chassid would display - that they took out the letter they had received from the Rebbe. And after reading it, I felt that I could sense why: There was a message that hit home, an insight that lifted the person above the vantage point from which he operated previously and gave him the perspective to find a solution to his difficulties.

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In these situations, the setting was important. I wasn't just reading a letter, I was seeing it in its context. That made it more alive. On the other hand, when the first volume of the Rebbe's collected *Igros Kodesh* was published, the feelings I had when reading those letters was not very different. In most instances, I did not know the recipient personally. Nevertheless, the letters opened up windows through which I could observe their lives, and more significantly, see how the Rebbe's insights enhanced their world view.

These feelings repeated themselves as each of the 24 volumes of *Igros Kodesh* was published. For these volumes tell us an ongoing story of the manner in which the Rebbe reaches out to people and gives them advice, compassion, and direction.

Literary output

The Rebbe did not personally write most of the books that have been published with his teachings. However, transcripts of his talks have been published and disseminated to all parts of the world, providing tens of thousands of Jews

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with his profound multifaceted interpretations of on a vast array of Torah subjects. The Rebbe did edit for publication over 50 volumes and another approximately 150 volumes have been published that contain transcripts of his talks and discourses. The subjects the Rebbe illuminated include: Biblical literature with particular emphasis on Rashi, Talmud, Maimonides, Kabbalah, Chassidic philosophy as well as the Jewish perspective on current events and world problems.

One unique characteristic of the Rebbe's teachings was that no matter how abstruse and complex the subject, the Rebbe would invariably find a way of gleaning practical lessons from these teachings. To the Rebbe there was no such thing as theoretical knowledge. Every idea of Torah, according to the Rebbe's teachings had to have an impact on our lives, and on the way we effect the lives of others.

Many of these works have been translated into several languages, and many have been condensed and adapted so that the Rebbe's unique approach to Torah, once again, can be accessed by tens of thousands whose way of

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thinking continues to be shaped by these profound and inspirational teachings.

Every time we delve into or even casually read the Rebbe's teaching we can feel the Rebbe speaking to us; stimulating our minds and opening our hearts and inspiring us to concrete action to be better Jews on all levels and thereby hasten the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach .

ESSAY SIX
SELF HATING JEW?!

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ESSAY SIX

SELF HATING JEW?!

Lately we've been hearing the term "self-hating Jew" employed to describe the various critics of Jews, Judaism and Israel. I must confess that occasionally I am tempted to use this pejorative and painful appellation for a select—but growing—list of Jewish academicians, media people, politicians, Hollywood stars, et al. who have expressed their anger and hatred of all that is dear to us as Jews. How many times have we heard ourselves saying, "We are our greatest enemy?"

One can even find Biblical support for such a designation. Just recently we read the Haftara from Isaiah, "Your destroyers and came from you."

The truth be told, there is no such creature as a self-hating Jew. A Jew by definition is a creature who as the prophet declares "Israel in who I

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take pride.” Or in the verse, “and your nation are all righteous.” Maimonides in his classic work, the Mishneh Torah declares that by his nature every Jew wants nothing less than to fulfill the will of the Creator.

How then can we account for the number of recalcitrant Jews? How do we explain the phenomenon of Jews siding with the enemy that wants nothing less than the total annihilation of the Jewish people?

The answer is provided by Maimonides himself: This refusal to follow the dictates of Judaism, Maimonides writes, is not intrinsic to the Jewish condition. It is the superimposed evil impulse that G-d has given us to provide for free choice that turns the Jew away from his natural proclivity for G-d and the Torah. All one has to do, Maimonides explains, is to remove the impediment that is surface deep. When that is done it releases the Jew’s natural inclination to conform to G-d’s will even when it appears to go against his own personal interests and comforts.

But even this analysis doesn’t explain the phenomenon of Jews unleashing unprecedented

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hostility against their own brethren. How could this negative impulse—which is a part of our personality—be so blind to the reality of the harm that one wreaks by collaborating with the worst of our enemies?

The answer to this vexing question has already been given by our Sages. And it is fascinating that modern psychology has discovered this phenomenon recently, a phenomenon known as the Stockholm Syndrome.

This phenomenon has been succinctly described by our Sages as the Galut Syndrome. In the words of our Sages who stated metaphorically, “Jewish daughters are all naturally beautiful, it is the degrading nature of the exile that has made them ugly.” This is taken to mean that all of the Jewish people are naturally beautiful. It is the suffocating, debilitating and humiliating phenomenon of exile that has covered up that natural beauty and given us the indifference, hostility and even the grotesque of phenomenon of Jews hating Jews.

So when we see the likes of a Noam Chomsky or other vitriolic critics of Jews, Israel and things Jewish, it is futile to direct our anger

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against the victim. These individuals are the victims of centuries, nay millennia, of anti-Jewish oppression. The unparalleled hatred of Jews and the deplorable conditions, to which Jews were subjected, is the culprit. When the defender of terrorism against Jews cites the Jews who support this outrage, we shouldn't state, "Well, he's a self-hating Jew anyhow." Rather our response should be, look how awful anti-Semitism has been. We have been so injured by the effects of intolerance, hatred, persecution—and yes, the temptation to assimilate and throw away our Jewishness—that we can see the victims of this scourge scattered throughout the Jewish landscape.

When a Jew rejects his or her Jewishness, it is not the Jew speaking but the force of exile that has twisted the minds of otherwise normal people.

If we have to vent our anger, let us get direct it against the hostage takers not the hostages. Let us get angry at the phenomenon called Galut-exile, and let us implore G-d—as we do many times each day in our prayers—to Bring an end to this scourge called exile and send us the

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Moshiach who will usher in an age of universal peace and harmony.

Moreover, while Judaism considers the idea of expressing outrage concerning the suffering of others commendable and a sign of a sensitive soul, we can't just live by anger alone. And while Judaism demands of us to defend ourselves against any physical threat to our well-being, defensive actions do not suffice. We must be on the offensive and tear down the walls of exile.

For every assault on our Jewishness, let us resolve to do one more Jewish act, one more Mitzvah.

For every anti-Semitic and hateful act directed against a Jew let us rededicate ourselves to doing at least one more act of kindness and expression of love for another Jew, in addition to our other acts of kindness directed to all.

For every attempt of the forces of exile to dampen our faith, spirit and joy, let us invest even more enthusiasm, life and ecstasy in the pursuit of our Jewish activities such as Torah study and performance of the Mitzvot.

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Every time the exile syndrome attempts to take us hostage by instilling the *galut* mindset into our consciousness let us resist. Let our mindsets be positive, optimistic, expansive and liberating. The cumulative good and positive energy will be the strongest force to rid the super imposed hatred from the Jew and non-Jew alike.

ESSAY SEVEN
SEXUALITY AND THE
RABBIS

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ESSAY SEVEN

SEXUALITY AND THE RABBIS

What could an old-style Chassidic rabbi say about sexuality in the modern day? Some of the readers are expecting the routine fire and brimstone attack of the promiscuous mores of contemporary society. I know that many would expect to get an earful of vitriol directed against the perversions of our time. Or, perhaps, you might be preparing for a lecture about the danger of AIDS and other venereal diseases promiscuity can cause.

This, I must tell you, is not what I am about to write.. In fact, I can fully comprehend why society has become so liberal in its views on sexuality. It is, to a great extent, a reaction to the repression of sexuality engendered by religion or, at least, the perception of what religion has to say about the subject. The perception - with, undoubtedly a healthy kernel of truth to support it, at least as some religions

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are concerned - is that in the eyes of G-d sexuality is, at the very worst, dirty, and, at the very best, a concession to our base, animal instincts. Some might even accord sexuality the status of a necessary evil for procreation. It is a means, albeit a rather lowly one, to reach the exalted end of bringing life and holiness into the world. Others might "justify" it on the grounds that it is our way of expressing love and all those other good emotions.

But, if these rationalizations for sexuality would be valid, why would G-d choose for us to bring life, express love and everything else positive, by way of something that is inherently flawed and animalistic? Why couldn't G-d, in His infinite wisdom, find a more appropriate way of generating new life? After all, we do have a model for procreation without the sexual act. I am referring to teaching. When a teacher takes an idea and imparts it to a student, who is intellectually barren, he is actually "planting" the concept into the mind of the student. The student, by allowing the idea to germinate, can ultimately develop a new level of understanding. The teacher has in effect created a new intellectual being. Yet, this form of procreation

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is so "clean" so sanitized, sophisticated and eminently human. Why, did G-d have to resort to sex for physical procreation?

Obviously, it was questions like these that caused many an individual to reevaluate their view of sexuality. How can one consider some of the most powerful forms of expression to be no more than a concession to some animal hiding in the dark precincts of one's soul? The response to this challenge was to remove the taboo concerning sexuality, to equate it with any other human function, to remove all inhibitions.

But, instead of really going to the essence of sexuality, its beauty, its purity and its holiness, those who have rebelled against the old-fashioned view of sexuality have gone to the opposite extreme. By flaunting the body and sex, by rendering it "normal" and making it public, these soldiers of the sexual revolution have, in actuality, distorted the true beauty of sexuality and stripped it of its true meaning.

Now, to be sure, the old fashioned view - and the perception many have of religion - that sexuality is less holy than other functions and is,

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at the very best, a necessary evil, flies against some of the most basic theological premises of Judaism. In relation to G-d there cannot be a distinction between the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual is no closer to G-d than the physical. And G-d, who is truly infinite, transcends the limiting parameters of both the physical and spiritual, and can therefore be found within both. The only way to "access" G-d is to make a world that is receptive to G-d's will. There is, therefore, no reason for sexuality to be viewed as something outside the pale of holiness. When sexuality is part of a way of life whose objective is the orientation of self to the Divine way of life, then sexuality is as much a Divine experience as anything we would ordinarily refer to as spiritual.

In fact, Judaism's view of sexuality is that it is one of the most powerful G-dly forces, which when channeled properly, i.e., within the proper context and discipline, can become the conduit for heightened spirituality. When reduced to the level of only a physical exercise for purely physical joy, however, it is like being exposed to a powerful surge of energy, in an unprotected way. "Safe sex" should not be limited to the

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physical barriers one uses to prevent the spread of the HIV virus. "Safe sex" means to create the right setting and understanding of sexuality so that its power can be accessed safely.

Without the spiritual understanding, the permissive individual denigrates sexuality no less than the prude. If the perception was that religion regarded sexuality as dirty, the modern day promiscuous individual sees it as a shallow, if not a mechanical, or, recreational, activity.

In truth, sexuality is neither. It is, in essence - from Judaism's perspective - a Divine instrument. When practiced within the confines of a relationship of commitment and love, as a profoundly private and personal experience, expressive of one's Divine soul, and particularly when one follows the laws concerning family purity, it is comparable to a beautiful gem which can be fully appreciated for its true value and beauty when it is set within its golden casing.

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ESSAY EIGHT
LETTER TO A SKEPTIC

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ESSAY EIGHT

LETTER TO A SKEPTIC

I was pleased to receive your response to the invitation to participate in our classes.

Contrary to what you might think, I was also pleased to read your questions that go to the core of Judaism. I realize that some of your views are diametrically opposite of ours, but I sense in your questions a quest for truth and an intolerance for superficial lip service to religion. I share both your penchant for truth and your impatience for superficiality.

Despite the apparently negative tone of your questions, I prefer Jews and, for that matter all people, who question, argue, debate and, in the end to agree to disagree, over those who are indifferent. You probably heard about the person who was asked, "which is worse, ignorance or indifference?" The answer was "I don't know, and I don't care..." Your approach is

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a refreshing alternative to the mindless and apathetic malaise that has so pervaded the Jewish community and society as a whole.

Concerning your questions, you, of course, realize that an adequate response would require a lengthy essay if not a book. I don't want to insult your intelligence by giving you some trite answers. Out of respect for you taking the time to write to me, I will attempt to answer your questions. However, I must choose the route of brevity and reserve the "right" to continue this discussion, if you so desire, and amplify my comments. Of course, I would be delighted to have you participate in our classes. We do have a mixed crowd in terms of their level of knowledge and I try to gear the class so that everyone goes away with learning something, whether they agree with it or not.

The basic Jewish belief is that G-d communicated the Torah at Mount Sinai, directly and through Moses, in two forms: written and oral. The Bible, or Written Torah, is clearly and deliberately an incomplete work; complemented by the oral tradition handed also down to Moses by G-d. Without the oral interpretations of the Torah, the Torah is

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unintelligible and can even be misleading. One example: nowhere does it say what constitutes work that we are forbidden to perform on the Sabbath. The oral tradition does define work. Another example: nowhere does it say how Cain and Seth had children. Who did they marry? The oral tradition provides us with the answer. A third example nowhere does the Torah write that a shofar should be sounded on Rosh Hashanah. Indeed the name Rosh Hashanah does not appear in the Torah. It was transmitted orally. These are just three, out of thousands, of utterly ambiguous statements made in the Torah that were clarified in the oral tradition.

The Written Torah has been compared to the lecture notes of a professor. No student can decipher these notes without hearing the lecture.

Jewish law is therefore based on the combined knowledge of the Written and Oral law (which was ultimately committed to writing in the Talmud and other classical works of Judaism).

In addition, the Torah commanded the rabbis or judges to enact new laws to safeguard the

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existing ones. Some of the prohibitions against various mixtures of milk and meat are clearly not in the Bible; nor has anyone ever made that claim. Not mixing dairy and meat utensils was not part of the Written or Oral tradition. It is clearly of rabbinic origin.

Is it G-d's will that we abide by the rabbinic extensions of the law? The answer is that it is no different from the Biblical command to honor our parents. If my mother tells me to help her clean her house, when I do so I am clearly conforming to the Biblical command of honoring my parent, although nowhere does it state in the Torah that one is obliged to clean a mothers' home. These answers, I know, raise new questions, but I think I have to leave those for a future occasion.

The short definition of chosen people is that at Mount Sinai, G-d chose one nation for greater responsibility. They were chosen to always be around so that they can fulfill their special mission. G-d had a plan for the world. He wanted us to make an imperfect and godless world perfect and hospitable to G-d's presence. To realize this goal, G-d chose a nation that was forged in the crucible of the twin pressures of

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Egyptian persecution and assimilation. He then charged them with the mission, not to convert everyone to Judaism, but to be the beacon of light that inspires others to make the world a civilized world. Towards that end, G-d gave us greater responsibilities and commandments that make everything we do revolve around sensitivity to G-d and humanity.

The age of the world is an issue of either secondary or tertiary importance to Judaism.

Moreover, science is not about certainty. It is about searching for the truth. Most, if not all credible scientists are humble enough to admit that their theories are not necessarily facts; although in the absence of a better theory their theories are recognized as if they were facts until it can be proven otherwise. To a certain extent, science is also based on faith and accepting certain axioms that may or may not be true. One can choose to believe in a theological version of creation and not be a mindless and irrational person even if it is not in vogue with the **current** scientific consensus. Especially in the twentieth century did science recognize that there is much more that is unknown than we could ever have imagined.

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The issue of the age of the world or the origin of the species is in the category of extrapolation and speculation. No one has ever witnessed macro-evolution in a test tube. I have no problem with someone believing in evolution, if they are willing to accept that it could only have occurred with a Divine hand guiding it along. Many in the scientific community are baffled at the mathematical improbability of it occurring without some outer force that manipulated it. And while evolution must have a belief in a Higher force to make it tenable and statistically plausible, the belief in G-d as Creator does not need evolution to make it reasonable.

On the issue of kosher supervision, I share with you some of the frustration with the commercialization of Kashrut. In an ideal world, if the community believes that it is a mitzvah to ensure and promote Kashrut, it should pay for the thousands of rabbis and mashgichim who ascertain and supervise these products. Alas, we are not yet living in a perfect world and the Jewish community places more emphasis on funding the education of Jews young and old as

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well as humanitarian concerns; and even that falls woefully short of the mark.

In conclusion, my remarks proved to be lengthier than I anticipated, and I hope I haven't bored you with them. I look forward to hearing from you. And again thank you for taking the time to write.

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ESSAY NINE
JUDAISM: A RELIGION
OF PARADOXES

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ESSAY NINE

JUDAISM: A RELIGION OF PARADOXES

Judaism is a religion of paradoxes.

In truth, Judaism is not really a religion. It is a non-religious religion, or a religious-non religion.

Religion is compartmentalized; Judaism is all-pervasive.

If religion is defined as a set of restrictions and obligations for certain times, places and situations that are essentially irrelevant to the essence of one's life, Judaism permeates every fact of life and every fiber of our being.

Judaism is a way of life that leaves no part of us out of it; yet, paradoxically, it is not restrictive. It is liberating and uplifting.

Judaism paradoxically believes in absolute Divine providence even as it believes in the human being's absolute free choice.

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Judaism is intellectual even as is anti-intellectual.

Judaism is optimistic and pragmatic.

Judaism fuses prophecy with down-to-earth reality.

Judaism is a disorganized organized religion. It transcends order even as it demands discipline.

Judaism is simultaneously an-all-of-the-above and none-of-the-above entry in a multiple choice question.

So if Judaism is a religion of paradoxes here is one more paradox:

Judaism has never changed and will never change, yet Judaism changes every day.

Another way of putting it: Judaism is a uniform religion that all Jews share equally, while Judaism is the most subjective and individualized religion.

When a Jewish woman lights her candles before Shabbat she senses a feeling of unity with all the millions of Jewish women who light candles before Shabbat now and who have ever lit

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Shabbat candles over the past several millennia. Yet, no two women say it with the same feeling. The heartfelt requests a woman makes to G-d while her face is covered is uniquely an expression of the deepest feelings of each individual woman.

When a man dons his Tefillin—it is the same Tefillin as Moses wore. It is the same Tefillin that Jews risked their lives to wear in the death camps of the Holocaust. Yet, no two men wearing Tefillin have the same feeling. One Jew thinks about how he connects with his G-d, another how he connects with his father and grandfather, and a third who does it as a way of connecting to his fellow Jew.

Jews are divided into as many cultural groups as there are cultural groups. Yet there is a uniformity that pervades Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Chassidim and Lithuanians, Polish, Galician and Hungarian Jews, Yemenite and Persian, American and African. Even those who are less observant and who are identified by various labels attesting to their heterodoxy are no less Jewish than Moses the greatest Jew that ever lived.

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To be sure, Judaism has standards and allows us to be judgmental when it comes to behavior. Yet, the same Judaism, paradoxically, does not allow us to be judgmental of people. Who knows what treasures of faith, goodness and holiness lie beneath the surface of each and every one of us?

We all possess a common G-dly soul even as it manifests itself in an infinite array of sights, sounds and colors. And while the individual note of one Jew may be off beat and out of tune it belies the beautiful symphony that lies beneath the surface and is trying to express itself but is prevented from doing just that because of the external distractions and impediments. The more spiritual astute will immediately detect that misguided note, and even as they try to educate the Jew to correct the errant note they will see through it to its true source of exquisite beauty. They will realize that soul of the Jew who sins is really trying to do a Mitzvah, but the message gets garbled as it tries to squeeze through the obstructive coarseness of the physical body and the layers of misinformation and improper education they received.

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This explains the saying of our Sages that a communal prayer that lacks the prayer of the sinners of Israel is not a complete prayer. For even that individual's prayer is an expression of an inner note that is perfect and whole. It just needs the closeness of the communal service to rectify it and reveal its true beauty.

Chassidic literature teaches us that the uniformity and constancy we find in Creation expresses the unity of G-d, while the multifarious nature of G-d's creations is testimony to G-d's infinity, as we say in our prayers: "How manifold are Your creations o G-d."

Judaism paradoxically combines these two features of constancy and change. The only thing that is constant in Judaism is that it is forever new, and with all the constant changes of Judaism it always remains the same.

The fusion of constancy and change that characterizes Judaism expresses an even more sublime aspect of G-d—that He transcends even the infinite.

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ESSAY TEN
THE PHILOSOPHY OF
JEWISH LAW

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ESSAY TEN

THE PHILOSOPHY OF JEWISH LAW

1. Introduction

In assessing the role and influence of Jewish Law on today's society, we frequently hear a reference made to the "Judeo-Christian" tradition as the origin of contemporary law. Citations concerning the similarities that abound between modern law and the Biblical tradition seem to confirm this belief. Most serious scholars of Jewish law, however, vigorously dispute that claim; and on several grounds. Firstly, the very term "Judaean/Christian" is a misnomer. There is hardly anything compatible in the two religions other than the basic belief in a Deity and the need for morality. However, that is the common denominator of most religions. Secondly, while there are some coincidental similarities between the two religions, there is far more substantive material which fundamentally distinguishes them.

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Similarities between two disparate entities can be attributed to one of several reasons. In most cases it is only a superficial resemblance, which is in no way indicative of any influence of one over the other. In other situations, there was a deliberate attempt at borrowing from an earlier system because of the benefit in adopting certain elements of an otherwise totally distinct philosophy and adapting them to the new ideology, in order to give the appearance of continuity. This would, of course, appeal to those who loath to give up their allegiance to the old tradition.

An example of this phenomenon is the integration of certain Jewish rituals into Christian life; most notably the Seder. A cursory examination of this practice will demonstrate that the reason for their adoption of the Seder is totally incongruous with the Jewish rationale for the observance of the same Mitzvah. Another example of this phenomenon is the oft cited resemblance between the Fifth Amendment and the Jewish law against self-incrimination. Though they are indeed similar, and there is reason to believe that the American tradition, in this regard, was influenced by

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Jewish law, the aversion to self-incrimination in these two disciplines derive from entirely different legal perspectives.

We shall return to this point, however, a little later in this paper.

It is not the purpose of this paper, though, to critique the foregoing view which sees our modern secular system of law originating in and evolving from the Biblical and Talmudic tradition. Instead I shall endeavor to focus on the insights and attitudes which characterize Jewish law and distinguish it from other legal traditions, both secular and religious.

2. Divine Authorship

Firstly and most fundamentally, Jewish law is predicated on the notion of Divine authorship. The Torah with its 613 commandments is the embodiment of G-d's wisdom and will which He had communicated to the world at Mount Sinai, some 3,300 years ago. This event has become known as the "Revelation of Sinai." Even the pronouncements of the rabbis and their interpretations of the Torah are seen as extensions of the original Sinaitic revelation in

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much the same - although not identical - manner that current Supreme Court rulings are seen as extensions of, and implicit in, the Constitution. Our Sages, in the Talmud, go as far as declaring that even when there are disputes among the authorities, both views are expressive of the words of G-d. In reference to the famous series of arguments between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel, the Talmud states: אלו ואלו דברי אלוקים חיים - "These and these are the words of the living G-d." Secular law, in contradistinction, is, by definition, a man made product.

Secondly - as a corollary of the first distinction - Jewish law was intended to shape and mold society, while secular systems of law are themselves shaped and molded by society. The Talmud underscores this objective of Torah to change society when it states that the Torah was given to refine and bring peace to the world.

Thirdly - and likewise a corollary of the above - while secular law can, and ideally should, be modified, adapted and even transformed as the needs and circumstances of society change and evolve; Jewish law, on the other hand, can never

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be subject to any modification, due to its Divine origin. All apparent modifications one finds in the Talmud and other sources of Jewish law are actually built into the original statement of the law.

A classic illustration of this is Hillel's enactment of the Pruzbol which seemed to have circumvented the Torah's cancellation of all debts during a Sabbatical year. What Hillel did was not to abrogate the law through the enactment of the Pruzbol - contrary to popular misconception - but to apply an already existing provision which allowed for the collection of all debts which were submitted to the courts.

3. Natural Law or Positive Law

Fourthly, in the ideal situation, secular laws must always be logical to the extent that they can be anticipated by rational man. One should be capable of following most laws, based on common sense alone, without having ever heard of them. At the very least, they should appeal to man's common sense once they are legislated. This is the notion of "Natural law" to which I am referring, the bedrock of other religious

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systems such as Catholicism, the roots of which can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Judaism, in contrast, is clearly predicated on the notion that no matter how far the human mind can go, there is something that must be revealed from the "outside," from a transcendent force which imposes itself on our existence. This approach has been termed "Positive law."

It is true that Jewish law speaks of the Seven Noahide Commandments as being "Natural". Had the Torah not been given we would have learned basic morality from the animals, the Talmud informs us. Accordingly, there is certainly an element of intrinsic morality within the world which leads mankind to intuitively discover basic universal truths.

The revelation at Mt. Sinai, however, introduced a new dimension of law into the world. One that is not related to creation and nature. When we observe the law of "Thou shall not commit murder," we observe this not only in reaction to our conscience but as a response to a "higher" power which dictates right and wrong. We cannot always rely on our instincts and conscience to keep us on the straight path.

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People frequently confuse various forms of inner physical and emotional turmoil as their conscience stirring within them. Humans have always been capable of rationalizing even the most bizarre and devious behavior when it would suit their needs and desires of the moment. It was imperative that these basic laws be given to us and imposed upon us by a Higher Authority to guarantee that we do not deviate from them.

In short, while Jewish law recognizes the value of a "Natural law" system and incorporates elements of it, the Torah remains - first and foremost - a Divinely revealed, transcendent order, which goes against the grain of rationality as often as it concurs with it.

4. Rights and Obligations

Fifthly, while secular law is concerned with, and addresses itself to, upholding, preserving and protecting the "rights" of mankind, Jewish law is concerned with the obligations we have towards one another and our Creator.

It is important to note that Jewish law differs in this regard even from other religious legal

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systems. In all systems of law - secular, as well as religious - obligations are limited to the specific area of concern which characterizes that particular discipline. For example, secular legal systems are concerned with preserving the rights of individual citizens and of society at large. Wherever no one's rights will be infringed upon, there is no need for legislation. Religious systems do not fundamentally differ in this regard. They just broaden the scope of one's obligations to include protecting the rights of the Deity, the church and other religious institutions. In other words, although superficially, it may seem that religious law is concerned with obligations, in contradistinction to secular systems, a deeper analysis will reveal, that all systems - with the exception of Judaism - are concerned with someone's rights. G-d also has rights. However, when we do not infringe on G-d's domain there is no need for legislation, even within the religious sphere.

Jewish law, in stark contrast, does not recognize the existence of any dichotomy such as the one expressed in the Christian Bible, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" an echo of the pagan Zoroastrian belief in a dualistic religious system.

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There is no area of life that is outside of G-d's "domain," not just in the philosophical sense of the word, but in the legal and practical sense as well. Every aspect of life is somehow governed by a Mitzvah of the Torah.

All religions compartmentalize religious experiences. There are times for religious experiences as there are the proper places and people for them. There are also times, places and people who are free to do what they please in their own time. G-d has "rights" and we have "rights." Just as it is deemed improper to trespass onto G-d's turf, so to speak, so too is it inappropriate for Him to impose Himself on our territory.

The Torah, however, recognizes no such distinction. There are no absolute, inherent, inalienable rights! Instead the Torah posits that we have continuous obligations. In certain times the obligation is more intense and pervasive than others. In certain times G-d obligates us not to be preoccupied with, what we normally consider, "religious" activities. We must work six days a week, declares the Midrash, just as we are obligated to cease from work on the seventh. Thus working for ourselves, during the

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six days of the week, is no less a Mitzvah, an obligation, than observing the Sabbath. Similarly, there are times when we must take it easy, not because it is our right to withdraw from the world of obligations, but, on the contrary, it is our duty at certain times to engage in leisurely activities to help us regain our strength for the future.

There is a beautiful story which so poignantly illustrates the foregoing "inescapability from obligations" notion endemic to the Jewish way of life. Two saintly brothers were incarcerated by the anti-Semitic Czarist regime. When they seemed to become oblivious to their punishment by devoting their entire day to the study of Torah and prayer, one of the guards - an anti-Semitic apostate Jew - confiscated their books. However, that did not help in dampening their spirit and joy because they had so much of their knowledge committed to memory. Thus they continued to joyfully discuss passages of Talmud and recite Psalms to the chagrin of the apostate Jew. Then, the evil guard, who was somewhat proficient in Jewish laws and traditions, thought of an ingenious, but diabolical idea. As Jewish law prohibits the

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recitation of prayers and the study of Torah in an unclean environment, he brought the barrels of feces and human excrement to their cell; but to no avail. The two brothers, who before rejoiced when they had the opportunity to study G-d's law and pray to Him, were now in ecstasy that they were able to serve Him in a rather unique way - by not studying Torah and not praying. Why was this reason for celebration? Because it is the same G-d who commanded them to pray and study who now commanded them to desist from engaging in prayer and study. There is no "freedom" from our obligations even when G-d Himself says that we are relieved of them!

Based on the above, we can now formulate a sixth distinction between Jewish law and all other systems, secular or religious. While each religion - and secular corpus of law - comprises several key areas of concern, be it civil, criminal, ritual, matrimonial etc., Jewish law knows of no phase of life which does not draw from the wisdom and direction of the Torah. Jewish law covers the totality of existence.

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5. Whose Body is it?

The foregoing leads us to yet another - a seventh - distinction between Jewish law and other systems with respect to the proprietorship of one's own body. In almost all legal traditions, one's most personal and sacrosanct possession is his or her own body. If there is anything that is inherently ours it is our bodies. Of course, every legal system does put some limits on that freedom, such as the state's intervention in preventing a suicide. However, the exception serves only to prove the rule that the right one possesses over his or her own body is virtually absolute and is to be overridden only when the rights of society at large are about to be infringed upon. It is not so much the concern we have for that individual's life that compels us to save that person's life against his will, but the realization that allowing this person to die might lead to a breakdown in society's commitment to life.

In Judaism's "obligation" oriented philosophy, one has no more right over one's own body than one has over someone else's. This assertion is based on Maimonides' ruling concerning a murder victim, who is pardoned by the victim's

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relatives. Maimonides rules that the pardon is ineffective. His rationale for this ruling is highly revealing: "Because the person is not the acquisition of his relatives but rather the possession of G-d." While the first part of his explanation is quite understandable and would have sufficed in explaining the law that does not allow the relatives to pardon the murderer; we must understand, as to why Maimonides found it necessary to add the phrase that the body belongs to G-d. Even if the body did not belong to G-d it is certainly not the property of the relatives!

Rabbi Shlomo Yoseph Zevin, of blessed memory, an illustrious Talmudic encyclopaedist of the past generation, ingeniously resolves this anomaly by claiming that Maimonides, by virtue of the additional phrase, is, in effect, introducing a new law. Even if the victim himself, prior to his expiring from the fatal blow would pardon his assailant, he would still be liable for the murder. This is so because the victim himself, even as he was alive, has no more right over his own body than the one who murdered him has.

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Again it is the obligation one has to one's own life and limb which restricts the person's own activities vis-a-vis his body. Moreover, even the rights enjoyed by us, insofar as our bodies are concerned, are not rights or privileges, rather they fall into the category of obligations. To cite a simple example: We have the right to work even in somewhat hazardous circumstances. This should not be viewed as a license to engage in recklessness, or a relaxation of our obligations towards our own selves, but rather as an expression of our obligation to work and support ourselves in an honest way that is of such overriding importance that it supersedes the obligation to be extremely careful in guarding our health.

6. Pursuit of Justice and Truth

The final - and eight - distinction between Jewish law and other legal systems that we shall discuss here, involves the very nature and composition of the judiciary. I believe the salient differences between them are as follows:

Firstly, in the Jewish courts everything is determined by a panel of at least three judges.

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In capital cases it is at least 23 and sometimes 71 who will pass judgment. At no time in the history of Jewish courts was the decision of guilt or innocence placed into the hands of a jury of one's peers. Secondly, the whole concept of a lawyer representing his clients was unheard of in our tradition. Thirdly, the accused - in criminal proceedings - cannot incriminate himself. Unlike the American system in which one cannot be forced to testify against oneself, Jewish law totally disregards and repudiates any incriminating statement the accused would make, either involuntarily or even voluntarily.

It would appear that all of these distinctions emerge from a more basic one. Our American system of justice is an adversarial one, wherein both sides have a responsibility to present their respective cases in the most favorable light; and in doing so attempting to prevent the other side from doing the same. Accordingly, it is not the issue of whether it is true or not that the accused committed the crime, but rather, the question becomes: has it been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that he had committed the crime. The prosecution must succeed in mounting a forceful case against the accused

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while the defense must attempt to raise doubts, even if it cannot prove his innocence. It is self-understood that the best judges of this are one's own peers who can be expected to determine which side was more effective in its presentation of the case.

It is also obvious as to why counsel is so crucial to this system. The average person could hardly be expected to stand up to the more experienced arm of law and justice, and present an effective defense, regardless of his innocence.

7. Self-Incrimination

And finally, the accused person's confession is certainly acceptable in the secular system of justice not because it constitutes absolute proof of guilt, but because it makes the entire need to establish guilt irrelevant. This is an obvious consequence of an adversarial system where the objective is to present the best case for guilt or innocence. When there is an admission of guilt, there is no longer a contest; the prosecution does not have to make its case because the confession has rendered the defense impotent.

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It should be noted, though, that there appears to be an inherent contradiction between this system's accepting and even encouraging a confession of guilt - based on the foregoing rationale, that it destroys the defense - and the trite legal adage that "One is innocent until proven guilty." If that noble sentiment would in fact have any truth to it, confessions would never be encouraged, because by doing so, one short-circuits the entire legal process, as the confession renders the entire contest moot. And in the absence of a trial, one's innocence should have been presumed.

Jewish law, however, rejects the very foundation of the argument that the case is a contest and that confession eliminates the need for the legal proceedings. On the contrary, as discussed earlier, a Jewish case is an exercise in the singular search for the truth; and if the confession would accomplish that goal it would not have been disqualified. Thus, the argument against accepting self-incriminatory testimony must be based on the notion that a confession might actually obscure and make the pursuit of truth more elusive. Maimonides (Hilchot Sanhedrin 18, 6) views the confession as a form

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of masochism or an attempt at suicide, whereby an innocent person confesses to a crime he never committed in order to be subjected to the penalty. And though, the likelihood of that happening is quite low, it is, nonetheless, statistically, a distinct possibility. It would thus be a crime to allow the courts to use this evidence in order to impose corporal or capital punishment, since the confessor might be the "one-in-a-thousand" instance where the confession is not sincere. Maimonides has expressed this very insight in relation to the Torah's rejection of circumstantial evidence, inasmuch as we might err and execute one - innocent person - out of a thousand guilty ones. In Maimonides' own words: "Better to let a thousand guilty people go free than to condemn one innocent individual to die."

Moreover, in light of our analysis of Jewish law's quest for truth, the fact that there is even a small statistical probability that the confession is not an accurate barometer of the truth, is sufficient for it not to be regarded as credible evidence. Here we must revert to a Chassidic insight - with regard to the uncompromising nature of truth. Truth, when compromised,

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even minutely," says the Kotzker Rebbe, "is no truth at all." In contradistinction to other virtues, even a reduced level of peace, righteousness, charity and the like, are still regarded as virtues. Not so with respect to truth where the slightest compromise of truth is no truth at all.

One might raise the question. If all this is so, how does Jewish law accept any evidence as credible - even of two witnesses? This question has actually been raised by Maimonides himself, who observes that the acceptability of witnesses is based on a "Scriptural decree." It is the Torah which ordained that witnesses are to be believed - that is why we accept their testimony, and not the reverse, i.e., because they are believable that is why the Torah says we should accept their testimony. Alternatively, it might be argued that logic dictates that we believe two witnesses who have no prior criminal record, after thorough cross-examination, and, who know the penalty for perjury (in some cases they receive the very same penalty as the accused would have gotten upon conviction; in capital cases - the death penalty!) This, in spite of the fact that there is

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still a remote possibility of perjury. This is so, not only because the statistical possibility of perjury that exists is so miniscule, and that no legal system can possibly function without accepting credible witnesses, but, in addition, it is due to the fact that the only way they can be perjured - according to Jewish law - is through testimony of other witnesses. Were we not to accept testimony of this set of witnesses on the grounds that it is possible that they might be lying, there would likewise be no way of determining they were lying since the second set of witnesses might also be lying. In short, the problem we have with confession is that it has an intrinsic flaw, in that confessions are often motivated by other concerns - such as suicide, according to Maimonides - which cannot always be detected. Whereas false witnesses can be weeded out by the threat of punishment, strong cross examination and the strong presumption of innocence and respectability the witnesses must have before they testify, a person confessing to a crime has none of those safeguards. Hence, even the slight chance that the person might be using his testimony to inflict injury on himself, suffices to

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have us view his testimony as being inherently flawed, and is therefore not regarded as evidence at all.

Be that as it may, the evidence strongly suggests that Jewish law is keenly interested in pursuing the truth as far as is humanly possible, within the context of its judicial system.

And again we return to our original contention that Jewish law is interested in the notion of "obligations" rather than with "rights," as is the obsession of other legal systems. When society is concerned with self-preservation - as a "rights oriented society" would - it cannot afford to expend all its energies in pursuing truth to the very end. Instead it opts for a short-cut approach; of having both sides of the dispute present their respective cases and let the jury decide. The crucial point is that no one side is being discriminated against, since that side can also utilize the system for his own benefit as well. Experience has shown us that, in the final analysis, justice will be done, and the guilty party will be convicted while the innocent will most likely be vindicated. Although cases of false and improper conviction do occur, they are indeed rare. For purposes of preserving the

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rights of society, this approach is adequate enough, while the other approach would be too cumbersome and taxing for society. In short, society is best served this way, even though it must compromise the virtue and ideal of truth and thoroughness so dear to the obligation oriented system of Jewish law.

Jewish law, on the other hand, takes the view that we must - because we are obligated to - pursue truth and justice without compromise. The interest of the Torah is not simply to protect the rights of people and society, but to give people a challenge and responsibility. Pursuing justice is one very important responsibility and cannot be compromised except in cases of emergency, at which point it is the obligation of saving society which overrides the need for justice.

8. Summary

To summarize all of the distinctions between Jewish law and all other systems of law, discussed above:

1) Jewish law is Divine, all other systems, man made.

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- 2) Jewish law shapes society, secular laws are shaped by, and are a reaction to, society.
- 3) Jewish law cannot be modified to suit the needs of society, secular laws can and must.
- 4) Jewish law is not (necessarily) logical and cannot (usually) be anticipated; secular law is a system of "Natural" law.
- 5) Jewish law is interested in establishing "obligations," while secular law is interested in "rights."
- 6) Jewish law does not compartmentalize, it involves the totality of existence; secular law, and, even other religious systems, are addressed to a limited number of life's experiences.
- 7) Jewish law does not recognize one's right to one's own body; secular law recognizes it as the most basic right.
- 8) Jewish courts consist of a panel of judges, without a jury and lawyer, who are interested solely in discovering the absolute truth, and before whom the only valid evidence is the testimony of witnesses. A secular judiciary is based on having the stronger side prevail.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

**JEWISH MESSIANISM:
A LOGICAL MYSTERY**

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ESSAY ELEVEN

JEWISH MESSIANISM: A LOGICAL MYSTERY

What is the common thread that runs through materialistic, secular ideologies and religious and mystical beliefs? It is the belief in a Messianic Age. Indeed, the more on the “fringe” one is in the secular world – such as the dogmatic allegiance to Communism – the closer they actually are to an obsession with messianism. Ironically, the Jewish mystical approach to the coming of Moshiach, notwithstanding its characterization as an article of faith, can be approached and viewed from a logical vantage point as well.

What is the basis for secular messianism? Inherent in the mindset of some secular philosophies is the notion that humankind is constantly evolving and that we will eventually graduate into a state that will transcend the egocentric nature of Homo-sapiens. When this will occur, a state of utopia will follow.

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Whatever the merits for evolutionary theory in the geological and biological arenas, there is, however, certainly no scientific basis to support evolution as it relates to moral attitudes. If anything, events such as the Holocaust, which occurred in the twentieth century, militate against such an evolutionary philosophy. Yet, despite the absence of scientific and logical support, there are millions of people who have accepted secular messianic beliefs without reservation.

Some schools of psychology will also argue in favor of a messianic belief from **its** frame of reference. While psychology cannot discuss whether a utopia is possible, it does recognize that when we believe that things will get better it gives us the ability to cope with life's difficulties. We have to have a belief in a "hereafter" of some kind, in order to make the "here and now" meaningful and worth living.

What is it then about the Jewish version of messianism that some find difficult to swallow? Could it be Judaism's affirmation that a human Messiah will usher in this New Age that has irked some? This would hardly seem to be a problem in light of the fact that throughout

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history, single individuals inaugurated most, if not all, major movements for good or evil. Is not history replete with leaders who have irrevocably changed its course? To believe that once again a great leader will ignite the divine spark within us that will inspire and challenge all of us to change the world is not unsettling at all.

What some find radical and disconcerting about Jewish messianism, however, is the **suddenness** with which the world will change. The image conjured up by many believers is one of a mythical, supernatural leader waving the proverbial magic wand that will instantaneously transform our universe; eliminate all vestiges of evil and create a utopian paradise. This image not only strains credulity, it also appears to insult our very humanity. After all, we are not robots or automatons. We do not change by a mere flick of a switch. If we would, we would not be who we truly are. And whatever good would come, would not relate to us. Indeed, according to Jewish theology, goodness that is not associated with human endeavor is not good in the most precise sense of the word.

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What good is there in a messianic belief system that speaks of instant, supernatural change?

From the perspective of Kabbalah and Chassidic thought, Messianism is, in fact, the very opposite of sudden, transformation. It is a process that has taken as many years as humans inhabited this planet to effect radical changes in the world. Humankind's collective efforts over the course of centuries and millennia have paved the way for a New Age. These changes occur through the observance of good deeds, that are referred to in the Jewish lexicon as *mitzvah* (*mitzvot* pl.), G-d's Divine prescription for a good life. Whenever we perform an act of kindness, for example, it leaves an indelible imprint on the world. In their aggregate, these acts have the capacity to utterly transform the world.

If there is a sense of mystery, it is not nearly as much about the Messianic Era as it should be about the nature of a solitary act of kindness. When we reflect on the power of a divinely ordained mode of behavior, it will become clear that there is more energy contained in this act than in any other phenomenon, natural or man

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made. This can be demonstrated from several vantage points.

Firstly, the word *mitzvah* (which we usually translate as commandment or good deed) actually contains another nuance – connection. By performing a *mitzvah* we create a connection between G-d who is infinite and ourselves who are finite. There can be no greater revolution than bridging the unbridgeable. Judaism believes that every time one does a *mitzvah*, one transforms an intrinsically finite experience, into an infinitely divine experience.

Secondly, the Talmud states and Maimonides affirms that a solitary *mitzvah* is endowed with the power to alter the balance of the entire universe. If we were to unleash all the fury of all our nuclear arsenals, we could not effect a change as profound and as cosmic as the performance of one solitary act of kindness. In this light, we can hardly imagine the cataclysmic results of all the times people have performed acts of kindness since the beginning of time, particularly, those who have lived since G-d revealed Himself at Sinai with the giving of the Ten Commandments. To be sure, people have

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also acted cruelly and unleashed untold evil. But, as the masters of Kabbalah have affirmed, evil, by its very nature, does not enjoy the same longevity as the forces of goodness. With the passage of time, the evil of yesterday has already been dissipated, whereas the positive energies endure forever.

From this perspective, the question we should be asking ourselves is how is it, in light of all the unleashing of positive energy, that the world still appears to be the same? For one who cannot comprehend the possibility of the world changing instantly and would deem the eventuality of this occurring to be utterly irrational, let him/her reflect on the real enigma instead. How is it that the thousands of years of goodness that the world has experienced have not made the world look drastically different? If there is something irrational about Moshiach, it is not how can we imagine his coming so suddenly, but the reverse. Why hasn't it happened already? Why has the world that has been bombarded with so much positive energy not yet exhibited the changes associated with the messianic utopia?

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Jewish Messianism is thus the final resolution to the enigma of good not carrying its weight. It is no wonder that Maimonides, the great rationalist, considered the belief in the coming of the Messiah to be one of the principles of Judaism. Despite Maimonides' attempts at reconciling Jewish beliefs with rational thought, he did not feel compelled to reconcile Moshiach with logic. Belief in a messianic outcome is the corollary of all the other theological foundations of Judaism. Once one believes in G-d, His system of cause-and-effect (that good actions leave a positive imprint on the person and the world) it is logically imperative that the world will change.

If the Messianic Age will take us by surprise, it is certainly not because of some waving of a magic wand. Rather, it is because we are so accustomed to a world that does not follow the rules of logic and our inability to sense the transformations that have been occurring since the beginning of time. The recent collapse of the Soviet Union can serve as an illustration. Outwardly, it appeared as if there was a virtual instant transformation. In truth, the seeds for the demise of the Soviet system had been sown

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years and decades earlier. While even experts were taken by surprise, we can now all look back and analyze the dynamics of the collapse that have been in motion since the very birth of communism. Similarly, despite the way the onset of the Messianic Age will take us by surprise, we will all be able to look back at the myriad's of actions that were chipping away, from underneath, at the very roots of evil.

Judaism's view of the Messianic Age then is that it is not some fairy tale, or a psychological crutch. It is the most rational consequence of centuries and millennia of human efforts that will finally bear their fruit.

ESSAY TWELVE
OUTLINE OF THE FAITH

COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

ESSAY TWELVE

OUTLINE OF THE FAITH

1. The essence, the main principle

Judaism has a universal world view that sees the purpose of humanity in general and the Jewish people in particular as G-d's agents to transform the world into a "dwelling place for G-d."

In simple language this means that we must do everything possible to inhabit, civilize refine the world in which we live. Concurrently, the role of Judaism for the Jewish nation is to bring G-dly and spiritual illumination to the world. This is accomplished primarily through the performance of the Mitzvos—the Divine commandments (of which there are 613), the study of Torah (which encompasses all of Jewish knowledge, that are all rooted in the Torah) and prayer.

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Judaism is a “religion” based on a foundation of faith and a structure of study, action, and prayer.

Faith is seen as the foundation of Judaism, without which the structure could not endure. Action represents the structure of Judaism. To have faith without action is like building a structure with only a foundation; it is pointless. Conversely, a building—no matter how functional—without a foundation will not endure.

Torah study and prayer are the way we cement our relationship with G-d and endow our actions with meaning, depth, light, energy and soul. Torah, Divine wisdom, given to us by G-d is experienced as G-d’s allowing us to “pick His brain.” It is also viewed as G-d’s “love letter” to us.

In short, Judaism sees us as G-d’s agents to fulfill a mission of transforming the world into a “dwelling place for G-d.”

2. The concept of G-d

G-d is simultaneously understood as the Creator of the universe who both transcends His own creation and is intimately a part of it.

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When we say that He transcends the universe, we mean that a) G-d does not have to be a Creator; G-d has no need to create. b) G-d remains inscrutable. We cannot fathom or describe G-d in any way. Logic is one of His creations and we cannot demand to make G-d conform to something He created. This does not just mean we cannot understand G-d because He is too deep, infinitely so, but because He is beyond the very concept of understanding and logic.

However, G-d, chose to create a world. He also chose to be involved in His world and is within every aspect of existence. He even chooses to allow us to understand some of what He does and why He does it.

While G-d interacts with the world through His attributes, His attributes do not define Him; they merely define His actions and relationship with our universe.

G-d's involvement in creation is more than just a compassionate father who looks after His children. The universe could not even exist for a fleeting moment without G-d's continuous creation of each and every atom in the universe.

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G-d, while preferring to have the world run according to the laws of nature that He invested within creation, is obviously not bound by those laws and can and does perform miracles.

Arguably, the most important tenet of Judaism is the belief in one G-d. This negates any form of polytheism, dualism, trinity, or any conception of G-d which sees any power outside of G-d or any composition within G-d. Moreover, the belief in one G-d also entails the belief that there is nothing besides G-d. This means that all of existence is either a manifestation of G-d's creative powers or a manifestation of His power to conceal His presence. Hence even where G-d seems to be absent; that too is a manifestation of His ability to be present and be totally concealed at the same time.

Although G-d is the exclusive power in the world, no non-human creature—including angels (which includes Satan)—has any independent power, Satan can do no more and no less than that which G-d allows and empowers him to do. In short, angels, the sun, the moon and all the forces of nature, have

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absolutely no power and may therefore not be revered and worshipped.

Humans, by contrast, were given this special power of free choice. Therefore we do have a right to show reverence to human beings for their good choices.

These human beings that have so elevated themselves through the continual right choices have become the “intermediaries” that help us cement our relationship with G-d. The power to do so is not because of their power; rather it is because they have renounced their egos by devoting their lives totally to G-d’s will. They have therefore voluntarily made themselves into G-d’s intermediaries by being transparent thus allowing G-d’s presence to flow through them into the world. Our connection to these holy people—much like Moses and Aaron—helps us to feel G-d’s presence. In the end, we are connected directly to G-d because they are totally transparent and do not serve as a barrier or even as our agents and proxies. They assist us in developing a direct relationship with G-d.

To the extent that they claim to have their own independent power they actually become a

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barrier between us and G-d because they too are distant from Him.

3. Faith and spirituality

As mentioned in #1, faith is viewed as Judaism's very foundation. Contrary to the myth that Judaism does not put the emphasis on faith, Judaism—especially within the Chassidic approach—faith is Judaism's most fundamental component.

The kernel of truth in the assertion that faith is secondary is the notion that Judaism views faith as the beginning and not the end. The objective of faith is to act in a manner that is consistent with that faith. For one to have faith in G-d and behave in an immoral fashion misses the entire point of Judaism. We are here in this world not to just have faith, for the soul before it descended into the physical world certainly had faith in G-d. Our souls descended to make a difference by living our lives in ways that are in consonance with that faith.

And while faith is the foundation of Jewish practice, one can have faith—sincere faith and not act accordingly. The Talmud describes a hypothetical scenario wherein a thief prays to G-

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d to be successful while he is about to break and enter the victims' property.

This might appear to be an example of hypocrisy, but if we think for a moment, who is the thief trying to impress? Chassidic thought concludes that his faith may actually be sincere. Moreover, if he didn't have faith in G-d's goodness he might not feel comfortable stealing because of the possibility of being caught. The irony here is that it is faith that causes the individual to behave contrary to G-d's will.

The explanation of this phenomenon is that faith is a peripheral emotion. It represents one layer of our consciousness which may or may not filter down into our conscious mind. Put another way, faith lies at the core of our soul. It may or may not percolate to the surface and manifest itself in our outer faculties of speech and action. Faith must be harnessed to our conscious self the way a locomotive must be harnessed to the other cars in order for them to move.

In Judaism there are many principles of faith. According to Maimonides, there are 13 principles of faith. It should be noted that

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although there are other classical authorities who dispute the number 13, their disagreement concerns the characterization of these articles of faith as fundamental principles. They do not contest the 13 principles inclusion in Judaism, nor do they dispute their significance.

Among the principles of faith, Maimonides lists the belief in one G-d. This belief Jews affirm many times daily with the recitation of the verse: "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one." These immortal words were on the lips of countless Jews who were murdered because of their fidelity to the Jewish faith. Even in the most "G-d forsaken" times, such as the Holocaust, thousands of Jews went to their death proudly and defiantly declaring their faith in one G-d.

Among the other principle of faith is the one that negates any physical form for G-d; that He pre-existed creation and will live forever; that He alone may be worshipped, no intermediaries. The remaining principles will be discussed later.

Faith is but one aspect of one's spiritual connection to G-d. Judaism also demands that we develop an entire set of emotions in the way

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we relate to G-d. These emotions include primarily love and reverence, In order to acquire these feelings one must engage in protracted meditation concerning G-d's existence and His presence in our lives.

The Jewish belief is that we possess a soul. The soul, a part of G-d, is the source of our existence and was sent from its heavenly perch to inhabit a physical body.

The degree to which each soul expresses an altruistic, selfless and G-dly nature is in direct proportion to the mission each individual has in changing the world. There are people whose souls are “on fire” who have a greater potential to affect the world, and affect it in greater measure, than others. But, everyone has the spiritual potential to make a difference.

The mind is not synonymous with the soul; it is but one aspect of our personality. However, it is the one that is most receptive to picking up the messages sent to us by our soul.

Now, since our souls are not physical entities but a spark of the Divine this spark or flame—depending on the nature of the person's mission and the resources needed for fulfilling

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it, the soul can never die. After death the soul returns to its heavenly source and lives forever in a state of G-dly bliss..

4. Rituals, worshiping and celebrations

Judaism puts the greatest emphasis on action. More specifically it refers to the action involved in the performance of the Mitzvot. The word Mitzvah (singular) or Mitzvot (plural) is commandment(s). Contrary to a common misconception the word Mitzvah is not translated as a good deed. While every G-dly commandment is, by definition, a good deed, the word Mitzvah conveys a far more profound concept. The phrase for good deeds in Hebrew is "*Ma'asim Tovim*"

On the surface, one may equate the performance of a Mitzvah with the term ritual. In truth a Mitzvah is much more than just a ritual. It is the way we affirm our commitment to G-d. By abiding by His commandments we demonstrate our utter devotion to His will, even if we do not understand the meaning of the Mitzvah.

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Furthermore, the word Mitzvah is cognate to the word *tzavta* that means a connection or a bonding between two entities. When we perform a Mitzvah we thereby create a connection between ourselves and G-d.

Even a cursory analysis would force us to come to the conclusion that it is impossible for a finite being to have a real relationship with an Infinite G-d. The only way we can bridge the gap between the Divine and the mortal is by us doing what He asks us to do. The mere fact that we were commanded by G-d to do something establishes a relationship. It expresses G-d's desire to connect with us and have us do something for Him. That relationship is cemented when we actually perform the Mitzvah; that creates the link between us and G-d in the opposite direction.

There are many other functions of each and every Mitzvah. A Mitzvah is also the instrument through which we transform the world into a civilized and refined world, thereby contributing to G-d's plan for creation; to make this physical world into a dwelling place for Him. In addition, each Mitzvah has the capacity to refine our own character. Since we are physical creatures, each

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and every time we perform a Divine act; it inspires, and conditions us to be more G-dly.

Along with the Mitzvos which are G-dly actions, Judaism puts much emphasis on prayer, which is the means through which we express our emotions towards G-d. Prayer, although vocalized for greater effect, is a profound meditative experience, in which we work on creating or expressing latent emotions for G-d.

Likewise, our celebratory events—Jewish Holidays—are intended to express our deepest feelings for G-d; our gratitude to Him for all of the miracles that sustained us.

In addition, Holidays were designed by G-d as times to experience genuine feelings of joy.

Judaism views joy and celebrations as integral parts of serving G-d consistent with the words of Psalm 100: "Serve G-d with joy."

5. Meditations, reflections, interpretations and mysticism.

One of the principle meditations in Judaism, particularly, within the Chassidic tradition—

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which places an even greater emphasis on meditation—is on the oneness of G-d. Based on the Talmud, the meditation when reciting the last word of the *Shema* (Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d the L-rd is one) “One,” which in Hebrew is *echad*, is as follows:

The first letter of the word *echad* is an Aleph (parallel to the letter A). The meaning of the word Aleph is “master.” It is also the number one (inasmuch as in classical Hebrew there are no separate numbers. Numbers are represented by letters). Hence the first letter of the word *echad* expresses the notion of G-d’s role as the exclusive Master of the universe.

The second letter of the word *echad* is the letter *chet*. The numerical value of this letter is 8 and it alludes to the seven heavens and the earth. The final letter of the word *echad* is a *dalet*, (equivalent to the letter d) and has the numerical value of four. This alludes to the four directions; north, south, east and west.

Now, when we put the entire meditation together it makes the following declaration: G-d is the exclusive Master in all of the six directions (i.e. 7 heavens and the earth up and

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all of the four directions). Not only is G-d one where there is no creation; G-d is still one and exclusive even after creation. Creation did not detract one iota from His oneness.

Some say that the Jewish Star known as the Magen David is a pictorial representation of the theme of *echad* because it has six points all connected by a core that represents the Divine that permeates all six directions.

Another meditation concerns the love G-d has for us. Despite the fact that G-d transcends all of existence, defies all definitions and does not have any need for us, He nevertheless chose to “lower” Himself and enter our lives every time we study Torah or perform a Mitzvah. Conversely, every time we transgress it is comparable to taking a mighty king who devotes his entire life to provide us with all of our needs and putting his head in the mud.

Jewish mysticism is a discipline that acknowledges that there is more to existence than just the physical world. For every physical object or phenomenon there is a spiritual counterpart. Kabbalah, which is the name for Jewish mysticism, describes four spiritual worlds

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that co-exist with our own physical world. These worlds form the bridge between the Divine – who transcends any of the spiritual worlds just as He transcends the physical—and us.

Jewish mysticism, with its focus on bridges the gap between the Divine and the physical, acknowledges the importance of combining a spiritual experience with the practical aspects of Judaism.

However, it should be noted, Judaism in general and Kabbalah and Chassidism in particular, do not equate G-d with spirituality. Spirituality just like physicality is a creation of G-d. If one lives a totally spiritual existence by denying oneself all but the most basic needs to survive and dedicates every moment to meditating, he or she is not necessarily closer to G-d than the hedonists who does nothing else other than indulging in the most sybaritic pursuits. G-d does not want spirituality per se; He wants us to transcend ourselves and our nature by doing what He asks us to do, whether spiritual or physical. Following one's passion for spirituality can often be self-serving. One can be a spiritual hedonist. Judaism is about being G-dly by doing

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not only that which is fulfilling to us but what is “fulfilling to G-d.

Having said that, Kabbalah does ascribe much importance to the spiritual realm as a means to endow the actions we do and the Mitzvot we perform with greater feeling, inspiration and soul. The relationship between the Mitzvah act and the spiritual energy generated is like that of the soul to the body. A body cannot exist without a soul, but a disembodied soul cannot possibly accomplish anything in this physical world.

6. Perception of the Universe

The Universe is viewed as a breathtaking testimony to the presence of a Creator. The vastness and multifarious nature of the Universe is used as a meditation in our prayers as a means to extol G-d's greatness.

However, Chassidic philosophy simultaneously emphasizes the nothingness of the entire Universe in relation to G-d. From His perspective the entire Universe is not even like a speck of dust. This premise is based on the fact that: a) the Universe is finite and G-d is

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infinite. For G-d who is infinite the entire universe rates no more than a speck of dust. b) the entire existence of the Universe is dependent on G-d's continuously creating it. If G-d were to withdraw His creative energy for one fleeting moment the world would revert to nothingness just as it was "prior" to its creation. Hence the Universe has no independent existence of its own. What we perceive as a vast Universe is actually G-d's energy.

However, Chassidism does not believe that the world is an illusion and a deception. Physical existence, the way we perceive it, is also part of G-d's plan. G-d wants us to live within a physical world and uncover the ultimate reality that it is all G-d's creative power. Even the concealment of His presence from us is a manifestation of G-d's power to conceal Himself, the purpose of which is to discover the reality the way it is from His perspective. We uncover the underlying truth by way of living a G-dly life, which is, as stated above, following the commandments that are G-dly actions not just goodly actions.

Based on the above, and contrary to certain secular philosophies, the Jewish belief is that the

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Universe had a beginning. It was created by a Creator and continues to be molded and formed by G-d. Even if one was to accept the theory of evolution, it could not have happened without G-d giving the forces of nature the ability to evolve. It should be noted that while one cannot accept evolution without G-d; one can accept G-d without evolution. G-d could very easily have created a fully mature world and human being without having to go through a process that takes billions or even millions of years.

7. The interactions and relationships of God and humans

While G-d is infinite and we are finite, G-d chose to interact with us by a) creating us with a purpose; b) informing us about that purpose; c) allowing us to have a relationship with Him; d) rewarding us when we conform to His wishes and plan.

Judaism believes that every human being can have a relationship with G-d but only on **His** terms. We cannot decide on our own how G-d will connect to us or how we will connect with G-d. The sin of the Golden calf was precisely

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that. When Moses, the G-d designated intermediary between Him and the people, was thought to have disappeared, an element of the people created a golden calf. Commentators explain that initially it was not intended as a replacement for G-d but rather a replacement for Moses. In other words, they decided that the golden calf will become G-d's method of interacting with the people in place of Moses.

That was considered a mortal sin even if they did not intend it as a replacement for G-d. The reason it was considered such a breach of faith is because only G-d could determine the means and method of His communicating with us. If we declare that our own efforts will substitute for G-d given commandments to foster a relationship with Him thereby "pigeon holing" G-d into that mechanism, it is tantamount to idolatry.

Judaism believes—and it is one of the 13 Principles of Faith espoused by Maimonides—that G-d does communicate with people.

This communication takes several forms:

The most forceful and fundamental communication G-d has ever had, and will never

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be replaced or superseded by any other communication—not even in the Messianic Age—is the revelation at Mount Sinai.

At that time G-d revealed to the world its purpose, and that He intended that purpose for all times, never to be abrogated or replaced with another system.

At Mount Sinai, G-d spoke not only to a prophet, but to an entire nation numbering an estimated two to three million souls. Although they heard only the so-called “Ten Commandments” (more accurately the Ten Statements), they witnessed G-d summoning of Moses to the mountain to receive the balance of the commandments.

Judaism also believes that G-d communicated with many prophets. However, a prophet, no matter how great, cannot change any of the teachings given at Mount Sinai. In the Book of Deuteronomy there is a clear passage that deals with the attempt of some prophets to utilize their incredible abilities to alter the law. Even if they perform miracles, the Torah exhorts us, we may not follow their instructions if they lead us astray from G-d. In fact, the Torah attaches the

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death penalty to a prophet who tries to do just that.

The purpose of prophecy then is to a) exhort the people to be more faithful to the Torah; b) to admonish them and convey G-d's threats to them if the people do not shape up; c) to instruct us about certain courses of actions that are not mandated or forbidden by the Torah.

The prophet must be a highly spiritual individual whose entire being is dedicated to G-d and His commandments.

Although the era of prophecy has come to an end at the time the second Temple was built—the last prophets being Chagai, Zecharia, and Malachi, the existence of prophecy did not cease. Even in our own day and age there are individuals who we believe G-d's communicates with and through whom He conveys His message for us. and through them. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, is a prime example of a man whose prophetic pronouncements are well known, and the thousands of miracles he performed, and continues to perform, are legendary.

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Although most people are not endowed with prophetic abilities, they can nevertheless communicate with G-d through prayer.

G-d also communicates with us as well in an indirect way. The Talmud states that there are “heavenly voices” that emerge from Mount Sinai daily that encourage us to “return to G-d.” According to Chassidic doctrine these voices are heard by the unconscious soul that relays it to the conscious mind. We feel these communications whenever we feel a spontaneous sense of inspiration or guilt or a desire to become a better person. Those fleeting sensations must be harnessed immediately to action otherwise these communications with their inspiration will dissipate and will be wasted on us.

8. The purpose of life

As stated several times above, the purpose of life has been set forth by G-d in the Torah. The Torah encompasses all of the Biblical works (referred to by some as the Old Testament, but Jews chafe at this characterization, because it is believed to be as new and relevant to all times and, as stated above, will never be abrogated or

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replaced) and the Oral tradition that was handed down to and through Moses at Mount Sinai and passed down orally from generation to generation.

The purpose of life is to align ourselves with G-d's will by making the greatest effort to put into practice these commandments.

The above is summed up in a Talmudic expression: "I was created exclusively to serve my Maker."

Chassidic thought looks at every aspect of creation and sees it in terms of its ultimate purpose. Our physical world is divided into four categories: Inanimate, vegetation, animal and human. The purpose of every aspect of creation is to be elevated to a higher level. So when we plant a seed in the soil (inanimate) and it grows food (vegetation) which feeds the animal, each one of those levels is elevated to a higher form of life. However, the purpose of these three levels is to be elevated and incorporated into the human being, which is the highest form of life.

What then is the human being's role if he or she is already at the top of the ladder? Is it to

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serve one another or a lower form of existence? That would mean that the process of elevation has stopped.

Chassidic thought explains that the purpose of humanity is to be elevated into the G-dly.

Within the general and overall purpose there are differences between people depending on and commensurate with the resources they were given. The mission does vary from nation to nation and from individual to individual. Each and every creature has its own potential. One should therefore not strive to be someone else but to be himself or herself by actualizing his or her own potential.

There is a story of the great Chassidic Master known as Reb Zushe of Anipoli who once declared: "I have no fear when I reach the heavenly courts if they ask me 'why were you not like Moses or Abraham.' I will give them an easy answer; I will say, I was not Moses or Abraham. What I fear is if they ask me 'why weren't you Zushe?' For that I have no answer..."

Judaism believes that all of humanity was chosen for a mission to make the world a

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dwelling place for G-d, as discussed earlier. This is a universal mission. However, generally speaking, humanity as a whole is charged with the responsibility to make the world a stable and civilized planet. Towards this goal there are seven Noahide commandments, to be listed below.

The Jewish people were selected from among all of the nations to perform 613 commandments through which they introduce G-dly energy and light into the world. Anyone who feels that he or she wants to be part of this specialized and more challenging mission can convert to Judaism.

To elaborate:

When G-d created Adam and Eve, He tested them. When they failed the test, G-d “waited” for another human being to come along with whom He could make a special contract (read: Covenant) that would give the human race the ability to change the world – to make the world into G-d’s “Palace.” Ten generations elapsed between Adam and Noah. Noah was a righteous person who was saved from the flood that destroyed the world, but Noah—despite his

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qualities—did not exhibit the quality that was necessary to influence and inspire others to follow in his footsteps. Meanwhile, to “maintain” the world, G-d told Noah and his sons that there are seven basic rules that he and his progeny must follow, to ensure basic stability in this world. We will discuss these laws – known as the Seven Noahide Laws—later.

G-d “waited” another ten generations, until, Abraham emerged as an individual who was not only righteous, but who was prepared to give his life in the dissemination of the message that there is one G-d, and that the world is not a jungle. G-d had finally found the person, who, of his own volition, accepted G-d and His objective for the world.

G-d then proceeded to make a covenant with Abraham, promising him that his descendants will become a nation to whom G-d will entrust His Master Plan for the universe; the plan that will enable us to transform the world into a “dwelling Place for G-d ” To facilitate their mission, G-d would give them the Land of Israel—the Holy Land—to serve as a model for the rest of the world, how to build a “palace” for G-d.

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After living through Egyptian Bondage—where they would get a taste of the pressures of assimilation and persecution they would have to endure in the future—they were liberated by G-d through Moses and given the Torah—the Master Plan at Mount Sinai.

This Master Plan had something in it for everyone. For the Jewish people it represented a comprehensive way of life, with a code that comprised 613 commandments. Every facet of life was to be governed by another of G-d's commandments.

For the rest of the human race, G-d had reiterated the seven principles, or seven Noahide commandments, that guarantee that the world will be a civilized, clean and good world. All of this is a prerequisite for the world becoming a G-dly world; a world in which everyone can see G-d's presence without any obstructions.

The seven Noahide commandments are:

- a) The prohibition against idolatry; having multiple gods.
- b) The prohibition against blasphemy; blaming and cursing G-d for one's misfortunes.

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- c) The prohibition against stealing in all of its forms and shapes.
- d) The prohibition against murder, including abortion
- e) The prohibition against sexual immorality, including adultery, incest, homosexual acts, bestiality.
- f) The prohibition against eating an animal without first killing it, a practice that was presumably common in ancient times, but exemplifies gross insensitivity towards G-d's other creatures.
- g) The commandment to establish a judicial and legislative system that would enforce the laws and legislate new laws to deal with the growing needs of society.

So the Jewish people and the rest of the human race were given parallel responsibilities: The Jewish nation was given the responsibility of bringing G-dliness into every aspect of life by observing the 613 commandments. The nations of the world were given the responsibility to ensure that the world is a civilized and decent world. Otherwise all other efforts at inviting G-d into our world will prove futile. G-d would

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not dwell in a world that is not fit. Both efforts are crucial for the fulfillment of G-d's Master Plan.

Moreover, after the Revelation at Sinai, the observance of the Seven Noahide Commandments are not just intended for "maintenance" purposes, but they are a pivotal part of G-d's Master plan. Hence, it is not enough for people to observe these laws because they were given to Noah, but they must be observed because they are part of G-d's communication at Sinai.

Within each and every nation or group there are more specific functions that are best suited to that group. And within each group, each individual has his or her unique contribution based on his or her potential.

How do we know what our specific mission is?

There are two paradoxical "tests" or indications. The first is whenever we see that a certain positive area of endeavor really gets us excited; we can assume that it is our soul's special mission.

Conversely, and ironically, whenever a certain project or required mode of behavior is met

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with stiff resistance on our part, despite the relative ease that is involved, it may be a telltale sign that this is the direction charted for our soul to fulfil its specific mission. The more crucial something is for us the greater the forces of evil/negativity mount a fierce resistance to its execution. Overcoming the challenge and resistance is one integral part of the mission.

9. Fulfillment of life

By living one's life in accordance with G-d's dictates the Human being ceases to be just a mortal who is no more than a sophisticated animal and has now entered into the realm of the Divine. This represents a quantum leap for the human being. When we help another human being and thereby empower him or her to better serve G-d that elevates us as well.

This constitutes the fulfillment of our life's purpose and mission.

There is yet another salient point here. If the purpose of every life form and every existent being is to be elevated into a higher form, when a human being utilizes a lower form to help enhance his or her relationship with G-d one

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thereby elevates all the other life forms and the resources that go into their sustenance and production into a G-dly existence. Human beings by their proper behavior elevate and instil meaning into everything.

If, on the other hand, if we are totally self-centered and use our talents just to advance our physical and material existence, we thwart the very purpose for which our souls descended into this world. In addition, we will also degrade all the resources that went into our sustenance and all of our talents rather than elevated.

As mentioned above, when we recognize what our specific mission is and pursue it even in face of difficulty, we will have fulfilled our soul's mission in this world. If we fail and come short, one of the remedies is for the soul to return to this world in another incarnation (yes, Judaism believes in incarnation). The goal then is for the person to rectify and complete that which was wanting the first time he was down here.

It should be emphasized that Judaism—particularly in Chassidic tradition—does not want us to shun the material world. Our goal is to use all of the material benefits and pleasures

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for the fulfillment of our mission to make the world a G-dly abode. In the process we harness technology and all of the modern changes and use them as tools to change the world.

10. Goodness, kindness, wrong and evil

Good and evil are concepts that only make sense with the belief that G-d is the one who makes those determinations. In other words, the reason it is wrong to steal, for example, is because it was prohibited by G-d. Once G-d forbids it, it becomes inherently and absolutely wrong.

If theft were to be rejected strictly on the grounds that it is anti-social or that it goes against Natural Law, we would always find someone who could make a relativistic argument. In the secular conception of good and evil nothing is absolute; virtually everything is grey and situational. Only a belief in an absolute G-d who does not change produces an ethical system that can never be abrogated.

This does not mean that Judaism does not recognize exceptions to the general rule, such as it is permissible to steal or even kill someone in self-defense. However, these “exceptions” are

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themselves based on the Torah. The original law was given with the understanding that there are extenuating circumstances which allow for the suspension of the prohibition. We cannot use our own intellect to rationalize away a Biblical commandment.

Goodness is usually used to describe acts of kindness. Acts of kindness include charity, extending a loan to someone in need; visiting the sick, burying the dead, comforting the mourners etc.

However, the Talmud discusses the preeminence of acts of kindness over giving charity. The Talmud offers three reasons: a) Charity involves one's resources; kindness involves one's body. b) Charity is only to the poor; acts of kindness are to rich and poor alike; c) Charity is only for the living; acts of kindness are for the living and the dead.

And even charity is measured by the degree to which one expresses kindness and exertion to help the other. Kindness is not **just** writing out a check once a year to an organization.

According to Maimonides, elaborated on in Chassidic literature, giving frequently does more

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for the donor than the amount given. Every charitable and kind act refines the person who does it. (Certainly, one's own refinement takes a back seat to the needs of the recipient. However, where the needs will be addressed either way it is preferable to give in increments so as to condition and refine ourselves by acts of kindness.)

Chassidic thought also focuses on a Talmudic passage that suggests that the person who performs acts of kindness receives more than the person who is the recipient of that kindness.

The rationale behind that is: When one gives to another, that person is fulfilling His G-d given purpose for which he or she was created, and becomes G-d's partner in this world. In effect, the act of charity and kindness validates our very existence and makes us worthy of living. The recipient is merely living; the donor makes a life out of his giving and living.

II. Do's and Don'ts, sins and redemption

The Torah contains within it 613 Commandments. Of these, 248 are "positive" or prescriptive commandments, which dictate what we ought to do. The remaining 365

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commandments are “negative” or proscriptive; telling us what we are forbidden to do.

Both categories are needed to make our life’s journey complete.

The 248 positive commandments serve to bring G-dly energy into each and every limb of our body. Indeed, the Talmud states that these 248 correspond to the number of bones/organs that we have.

In addition, insofar as the world is concerned, each and every Mitzvah that we perform brings the world closer to having reversed the process of creation in which G-d creates a vacuum and space for us to exist that is devoid of His presence. The Mitzvah regenerates G-dly energy into this void. And when we reach “critical mass” the world will have reached the stage of perfection at which time the Moshiach will usher in the Messianic Age, when the entire world will see the fruit of its labor and G-d’s presence will be manifest for all.

The negative commandments also serve two functions:

Insofar as the individual who is tempted to act in a sinful manner and resists that temptation,

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it has the capacity to refine the person in ways that even exceed the degree of refinement involved in a positive act because it elicits a tremendous force that derives from the inner core of our soul.

In addition, insofar as the world is concerned, the Zohar, the principle work of Jewish mysticism, states that whenever a person suppresses the impulse to do a forbidden act, he generates a surge of a transcendent G-dly energy. Unlike the more conventional and subdued form of energy we generate through the observance of positive actions, the avoidance of the negative under pressure elicits an unconventional Divine force.

The advantage of the positive over the negative is that the positive act becomes the “receptacle” that enables us to integrate and internalize that energy. The transcendent light generated by resisting temptation cannot be internalized as easily because it is so utterly beyond us and there is no “instrument” through which it can be accessed. It, more or less, hovers above us and affects us indirectly.

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When we violate these two areas of G-dly endeavor (by sins of commission or omission) it does two things: First it distances us from G-d because our transgression is an act of rebellion. Second, with regard to sins of commission, it creates a defect in our soul. The soul becomes less receptive to G-d and spirituality in general.

A person is not locked into that state of alienation and spiritual degradation. The Torah provides for personal redemption. It is called *Teshuvah*, which is generally mistranslated as “repentance” but actually means return.

The term “return” implies that the core of the person is pure and good. The natural state of the human being—and of the world—is positive. This may be referred to as “original virtue.” The sin is a superimposed aberration on the pristine pure and holy essence of the world and humanity in particular. Man and woman were created by G-d and placed in the Garden of Eden to dramatize the fact that our world is inherently a garden. Sin is the aberration not the default position of the human being. Thus, when a person “does” Teshuvah they are “merely” returning and restoring his or her original goodness and holiness.

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Teshuvah is a multi-tiered experience. On the simplest level it entails sincere resolve for the future. The one who does Teshuvah resolves never to do the sin again. On the highest level, Teshuvah involves the generation of such passion to reconnect to G-d that the person reaches an infinitely higher level than he would had he not sinned. This idea is captured by the phrase coined by Talmudic Sages: “The place where the Ba’al Teshuvah stands, the perfectly righteous cannot.” And it is this dimension of Teshuvah—the one motivated by intense love to return to G-d—about which the Talmud declares that the sins are transformed into virtues. This is so because the sin becomes the fuel that creates a far greater love and passion for G-d and fuels the incredible dynamic of return.

In Judaism there is no person and no time that is beyond Teshuvah. Even if G-d says, “You cannot do Teshuvah,” or “your Teshuvah will not be accepted” it is to be understood as a test to see how deep one’s desire it is to get close to G-d. No person is beyond being saved.

The above only applies to sins against G-d. For sins against other people we cannot be forgiven

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unless we also make restitution and receive forgiveness from the aggrieved party.

12. Insights into the human experience

A human being is not a more advanced stage in the evolution of animals. Whatever value the theory of evolution has, it cannot deal with metaphysical reality.

The human being is a qualitatively different creature not because he or she is smarter than a primate but because human beings are endowed with souls which allow them to transcend their own existence.

The human being can consciously decide that he or she will forgo his or her own pleasure and need for the benefit of a total stranger. That is a uniquely human experience.

In classical Jewish sources the human being is called a *medaber*-a speaker or communicator. What distinguishes the human being from the animal is also his or her ability to communicate. Human communication is the human being's ability to project outside of himself or herself.

According to the Talmud, the human being is both superior and inferior to all other creatures.

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The last creation recorded in Genesis is the creation of Adam and Eve. Why was man created at the end? The Talmud provides two answers: The first is that a human being who becomes arrogant should know that even a gnat was created before him and is therefore superior to him, The second reason is that G-d wanted to insure that everything would be ready for man to use; he should not have to wait until other parts of creation were made available to him.

A great Chassidic Master once said, “a person must have two statements in his pockets; one that says ‘the world was created for my sake’ and the other that reads ‘I am but dust and ashes.’”

The human being, because he or she is qualitatively beyond all other creatures, is superior to them. Only the human being can fulfill G-d’s plan for the creation. The human being utilizes all other parts of creation to realize that goal.

The human being, because he or she is qualitatively beyond all other creatures he or she is simultaneously, inferior to them. Because

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the human being has free choice to realize his or her mission and chooses to shirk his or her responsibility, he degrades himself and the rest of creation. No other creature can violate its purpose for existence.

Another uniqueness of the human condition even in relation to angels is that an angel is a programmed being and can only go in one direction. A human being is a composite, multifaceted being and can multi-task and even go from one extreme to another. Humans are capable of expressing opposite emotions, going from one direction to the other, balancing and synthesizing all of the disparate forces and influences.

13. Confirmation, joining the group

Judaism believes that a Jew is one whose mother is Jewish. However, Judaism also allows for conversion to Judaism.

Judaism, however, does not encourage conversion to Judaism principally for the following reason:

Judaism believes that G-d chooses everyone, and gives every person a role in executing His Master Plan by living a life in accordance with

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the Seven Noahide laws (to be discussed below). Even in the Messianic Age, when the world will reach its state of perfection, the Jewish belief is that there will still be non-Jews. There is no reason for the non-Jew to become Jewish.

Once one who sincerely wants to join the Jewish people and goes through a proper conversion, he or she is fully embraced by the Jewish community.

Before a person entertains the notion of conversion it is crucial that he or she understands what the different roles of Jews and non-Jews are.

When G-d gave the Jewish people the Torah at Mount Sinai, He selected them from among all of humanity for a special role. As stated above, their role is to bring G-dly light into the world so that the world becomes a “dwelling place” for Him. To realize this monumental task, the Jewish people were given special spiritual resources that will enable them to survive and thrive despite the enormous twin challenges of persecution and assimilation. And while there are great benefits and rewards to being Jewish there is also tremendous suffering and sacrifice.

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Only a person who feels that he or she wants to acquire this new and extremely challenging mission can convert. The convert must be prepared to accept all of the Biblical and rabbinical commandments; shoulder all the individual responsibilities of Judaism and share the fate of the Jewish people. If these individuals who seek to convert do not feel that way, it would be a mistake for them to neglect and abandon their own G-d given mission, for which they were given all the requisite resources.

Once a person converts to Judaism, in total conformance with Jewish law, he or she is regarded as a full-fledged Jew. The Torah admonishes us to love the convert and do everything we can to make them feel a part of the community. Some of Judaism's greatest leaders and role models were converts or sons and daughters of converts. These include Jethro, Ruth, Shmaya, Avtalyon, Onkeles, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Meir and countless others.

There is also another principle about a convert to Judaism. The belief is that the sincere converts, by virtue of their conversion, have demonstrated that they already had a "Jewish soul." That means that they were born endowed

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with the potential to fulfill the special mission of the Jewish people. The conversion process served as the means to prove that this is indeed the case and to actualize their potential. No one really converts to becoming Jewish; they merely actualize their potential.

Once a Jew boy has reached the age of Bar Mitzvah (13) and a girl has reached the age of Bat Mitzvah (12) there is no need for any confirmation. Every time a Jew performs a Mitzvah he or she is proudly and resolutely confirming his or her status as a Jew who is connected to G-d and to his or her people. Hence, Judaism never had a need for a formal confirmation ceremony.

14. The life cycle

A. Beginning of life

There is no one point at which life begins. In certain respects life begins at conception; 40 days after conception; birth, circumcision for a boy, Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13, marriage etc. Each stage of life introduces the person to a new status with added obligations and privileges.

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While there are many grey areas with respect to abortion, there are two undisputed positions:

Abortion as a means of birth-control or for frivolous reasons (parents want a girl etc.) is forbidden. Abortion to save the life of the mother is permitted. Abortion for other strong emotional reasons (such as incest, rape, mother's health, viability of child etc.) where there is absolutely no threat to the mother's life is disputed.

The position that forbids it under those circumstances considers the fetus (after 40 days of conception) to be human-being. The only difference is that it is not an **independent** human being. In the terminology of Chassidic philosophy: A human-being is a composite of body and soul. Murder is the act of separating the body from the soul. A fetus has a body and it also has a soul; however, its soul is its mother's. The fetus's own soul, though operating on the periphery of its body is not what keeps it alive. Hence, killing a fetus is equivalent to killing a human being, but it still does take a back seat to the life of the mother who is the fetus's source of life.

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The soul **begins** its integration with the body at the time of the Bris-Circumcision for a boy and the baby naming for a girl. The Bris is a covenant between the Jew and G-d. Women are considered naturally circumcised and their covenant does not require any physical alteration of their body. In Jewish mystical literature, the man is considered to be imperfect and needs the Bris and other physical rituals to help perfect him, whereas a woman's creation is much closer to the way she was intended to be.

B. Maturation

As stated, the G-dly soul enters the body near the time of birth. However, as long as the child has not reached the age of maturation—Bar or Bat Mitzvah—the soul's integration into the body is incomplete. Children are therefore not held responsible for their actions, since their Animal Soul is fully developed and functioning unhindered, whereas their G-dly Soul is still finding its way into the system.

During this period, Judaism places the onus of the child's behavior on the parents. They are responsible to educate their children and are held accountable for their children's behavior.

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At the age of 12 for a girl and 13 for a boy, the child is no longer free of his or her own responsibility. At that point their soul has made its full entry into the body and now the struggle between the Animal Soul and the G-dly Soul is a fair contest.

This is the age when the child is considered an adult and is responsible for the observance of all the Biblical and Rabbinic commandments.

One of the most important parts of the Bar Mitzvah for the boy is this commencing to perform a Mitzvah-commandment called Tefillin. Tefillin are leather boxes containing Biblical scrolls that highlights: a) Belief in one G-d; 2) Love of G-d; 3) Commitment to study Torah and observe all of the commandments and 4) the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. These are worn on the arm near the heart and on the head. This Mitzvah is not performed before Bar Mitzvah because of the sanctity of the Tefillin, the rabbis felt that the child would not comport himself appropriately with the right thoughts and preparedness. One of the most exciting parts of the Bar Mitzvah is the wearing of the Tefillin for the first time. (Although in some communities it is worn a

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few weeks before Bar Mitzvah to help train the boy as to its proper procedure.)

Although the obligation to educate the child that devolves on the parents is in effect until Bar Mitzvah, parents are still responsible for their children's education even after that age. The difference is only in the degree of their responsibility.

It is customary, to have a celebration to mark the momentous occasion of transition into adulthood. Traditionally the celebration was restricted to boys and it involved the boy getting called up to the Torah on a day that the Torah was read publically (Mondays, Thursdays, Saturday morning and afternoon, and on all Jewish Holidays and fast days). The Bar Mitzvah boy would in some instances serve as the reader, which involves memorizing the correct pronunciation of the Hebrew words with all of their musical notes known in Yiddish as *trop*. That is some feat because the Torah scroll has no vowels, punctuation, or notes written in it.

In most communities in the past, the Bar Mitzvah boy would also study and memorize a Talmudic discourse, usually on the topic of the

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commandment of Tefillin, which he would commence observing at the age of 13.

In some Chassidic circles (Chabad in particular) the boy would also memorize and recite a Chassidic text dealing with profound mystical and philosophical interpretations of the Tefillin observance.

Unfortunately, in many communities the Bar Mitzvah celebration lost its underlying rationale which is to celebrate the child's entry into an age of greater responsibility and observance of the commandments, and not a graduation from Jewish education.

In Chassidic circles the Bat Mitzvah is also observed with no specific ceremony. Usually, girls and women gather at the home of the Bat Mitzvah girl where she would deliver a speech that contains her understanding of what it means to be a Jewish woman based on Jewish classic texts.

In Chassidic circles, women are also given a solid Jewish education. In some subjects her education is even more extensive than boys. However, the emphasis in the study of Jewish law for girls is on its more practical side, while

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boys focus much of their time and energy on the theoretical basis for the laws as elaborated on in the Talmud and Talmudic commentators.

C. Marriage, family and social structure

Marriage is viewed as Judaism's most important institution. In fact, the High Priest in Biblical times had to be married. Celibacy, as a matter of choice, is considered a sin. Obviously, there are people who cannot get married for a variety of legitimate reasons. They would certainly not be faulted for that; but a conscious, philosophical objection to marriage is considered wrong and flies against the very purpose for which we were brought into this world.

The very first commandment in the Torah is to be fruitful and multiply, which can only occur within the framework of marriage.

Marriage, according to Jewish mystical tradition, is the reunion of two half souls that were separated at birth. This implies that when we marry our soul is now working with all of its cylinders operating at full speed and we are

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ready to tackle the world with all of its challenges.

Marriage can be considered the beginning of a person's real challenge to transform the world into a "Dwelling-place for G-d." Before marriage we lack a) the full capacity of our soul; b) we have not yet entered into the material world with all of its challenges.

Marriage, therefore, is not just about procreation. The very union of these two half souls is, in and of itself, a major spiritual accomplishment that has cosmic effects.

A marriage is considered to be a reenactment of the first match, of Adam and Eve, when they were still in the Garden of Eden before their sin. Marriage is also considered a reenactment and a microcosm of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, when G-d was "betrothed" to the Jewish people; the Torah being the marriage contract. The entire Biblical Book of Shir HaShirim-The Song of Songs is a love song between G-d and Israel that was experienced at the time of the Exodus and at Sinai and is reflected in every proper marriage. And marriage is also a portent of the future

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consummation of the bond between G-d and His people in the Messianic Age.

Marriage introduces a most powerful G-dly energy into the couple and through them to their home and beyond. If they merit to live a harmonious, holy and spiritually healthy life, the Divine presence rests in their midst as it did in the Holy Temple.

D. Attitudes toward children and Elderly

Children and elderly represent two ends of the spectrum of life. There is something positive that links these two stages of life.

Youth, in general, and childhood in particular, is punctuated by the energy it exudes. This is viewed as G-d's gift to us. Therefore the way we harness that energy for the good, which depends on the way the child is educated, will determine the spiritual quality of that individual's entire life. This is essentially what King Solomon declared: "Educate the child according to his way, even when he will be old he will not depart from it." While we expect an adult to mature and go beyond infantile approaches to life, we want to preserve the youthful zest and G-dly energy that is youth,

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Moreover, children, despite their lack of sophistication, nay because of it, are more expressive of G-d's utter transcendent "simplicity." In other words, G-d is beyond any description or definition, such as He is love or Supreme Intelligence, Creator, All Powerful. Those are valid descriptions of His actions and manifestations, not His Essence. The child's innocence and simplicity is an expression of that G-dly simplicity that recedes into the background in the process of maturation.

The Talmud states that the world exists on the merit of the children's study of Torah because their breath is devoid of sin.

The other end of the spectrum of life, old age, is not considered a time of spiritual decline. On the contrary, the Talmud states that one must show respect to all senior citizens even if they lack knowledge because they were, in fact, educated by life's experiences.

The fact that the elderly lose some of their physical abilities with age is a sign that G-d wants them to focus on the intellectual, emotional and spiritual side of their personalities. Even if they lose their memories

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and cannot function in any capacity, G-d forbid, they still retain every one of their life's positive accomplishments that can never be erased.

For that reason the Talmud states that one should give respect to the elderly sage who has forgotten his knowledge. It cites the fact that "the shattered tablets were placed in the same ark as the whole tablets."

Senior citizens are encouraged to focus on the more spiritual side of their lives and look at this period in their lives as a challenge to grow spiritually; never view it as a period of decline.

E. Death and dying

Judaism is a philosophy that celebrates life. However, as death is inevitable, it must also be considered to be part of G-d's plan for life. Our mortality is one of the ways we recognize that we have challenges that we must meet within a prescribed period of time. If we thought we had endless time to live we would postpone much of our efforts to transform the world.

In Judaism, death is not overly feared because we know that it is not the end of our existence; it is the beginning of a new phase. Conversely, death is not celebrated either because Judaism

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believes that this life with its ample opportunities to perform Mitzvot is superior to the afterlife where the soul “merely” basks in the light of its accomplishments.

Jewish law is very much concerned with not doing anything to hasten the process of death and. Indeed, even to use extraordinary measures to preserve life. However, Jewish law also recognizes that there is a time when death is imminent and it places certain restrictions on what we may do to preserve life. Each and every situation is considered to be unique and conscientious Jews will never sign any document such as a DNR without consultation with a competent rabbinic authority who is well-versed in these very complicated and sensitive matters.

In Judaism, every aspect of life is governed by Jewish teaching. Certainly an event as monumental as death is informed, guided and illuminated by Jewish law, which is believed to be G-d’s instruction to us. Every aspect of life and death are ultimately in His hands. He revealed His will and intentions to us through the teachings of the Torah.

F. Burial

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Judaism believes that the body is also holy for several reasons:

(a) It was created in G-d's image. (b) It is the Temple of the soul; (c) The performance of countless Mitzvos, G-dly acts sanctify the body.

In the mystical teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism the body is considered to even have a higher spiritual "source" than the soul. The soul's mission, among other objectives, is to teach the body, refine it, elevate it, transform it, thereby revealing and actualizing the Divine energy that is its source.

Because the body is not simply a temporary dwelling for the soul but has intrinsic value we treat the body with respect and do nothing to destroy or mutilate it even after death.

Moreover, one of Judaism's cardinal beliefs is that in the Messianic Age the dead will be Resurrected, we may therefore not do anything to the body that demonstrates that death of the body is the end of its existence.

On the other hand, Judaism acknowledges that the body will decompose in the ground. In fact, it does not allow us to do anything to prevent that process from occurring by burial in a vault

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or in any other way the body's natural decomposition process will be delayed.

The rationale for this is Biblical. G-d tells Adam "From the dust you come and to dust you shall return."

The purpose of returning to dust is that it is an atonement process for the body which may have been tainted by all of the negative behaviors of which most people are guilty. For a body not to decompose even when interred unhindered in the earth is either a horrible punishment that denies this body the opportunity to be purified and atoned for, or it is a sign that these persons were so righteous and holy that their bodies do not need this purification process.

In Jewish tradition, the body is washed and purified physically in a special ritual and dressed in simple white linen shrouds and placed in a simple unadorned pine box. The reason for this is to maintain equality for all, rich and poor, so that the poor will not be embarrassed.

G. Beyond death, is there life beyond death?

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Judaism believes that the soul lives on forever. By definition therefore, there must be eternal life for the soul. However, since the soul is a totally spiritual entity there can be no suggestion that the soul will enjoy physical pleasures in the afterlife. Indeed, spiritual pleasure is infinitely more blissful than any physical pleasure.

15. The ideal eternal life

The soul, upon leaving the body, ascends (in a spiritual non-spatial sense) to the heavenly tribunal where it is judged. If a person is deemed to be righteous he or she will be sent to Paradise, a spiritual location where the soul will feel a state of blissful connection with G-d. Judaism believes that those people whose lives were less than righteous will have to go Gehinom, or the Jewish version of hell. Gehinom is not simply a punishment for the sake of punishment, rather it is a purification process, where the soul is cleansed of all the undesirable adhesions to itself that prevent it from being able to receive and absorb the Divine bliss in Paradise.

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According to Jewish tradition, it is benefit for the soul to go through this process. A far greater punishment is for the soul to be denied entry into Gehinom.

As an alternative to Gehinom, the soul might be required to come down again into this world and be reincarnated into another body to rectify that which it had damaged or failed to accomplish the first time around. A soul may enter this world multiple times until it gets it right.

Ultimately, all of the righteous souls will return to the physical world at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead, which will occur after the onset of the Messianic Age. After the Resurrection, we will live on forever. Death will have been conquered and we will live on for eternity basking in the light of the Divine.

16. What is Well - Being? How to achieve it?

Well-being can best be described as a state of harmony with G-d, other people and oneself.

Life, by definition is fragmented. The fragmentation and the conflicts that arise from it manifests itself in many ways: There can be a rift between G-d and our world, between one

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nation and another, one person and another, husband and wife, two brothers, body and soul and even within one's soul, a person can be pulled in many different directions.

Well-being can be achieved when one finds the unity that underlies all of the different directions.

There are two ways one can express unity. The first is to negate or ignore anything that goes against your comfort zone. The second is to forget the differences and focus on the things that unite.

The idea of unity and peace is central to Judaism. The Mishnah states: "G-d could not find any other vessel that contains peace in His world other than shalom-peace. Peace and unity are the most cherished values in Judaism that even trumps truth. Despite the fact that truth is G-d's "seal", one may cover the truth in order to preserve peace. Aaron, Moses' brother, according to Talmudic tradition, would dissemble in order to bring peace to two people. He would tell one side that he heard that his adversary was sorry and really wanted to get back together. He would then repeat this

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“white lie” to the other party to the conflict, thereby bringing them together.

Chassidic thought explains that it was not a lie. He knew that deep down they were not adversaries. If they had been true adversaries no dissembling would help.

When a person learns how to get along with others—even those he disagrees with, without compromising values and beliefs—one finds peace of mind and joy.

Another important ingredient in well-being is gratitude and happiness. In truth, the two go together, happy people are grateful, and grateful people are happy.

Happiness is a trait that requires one to recognize that he or she has a purpose in this world and that his or her life is directed towards realizing that purpose. Happiness is not achieved by the pursuit of happiness but by the pursuit of higher goals and objectives; especially those that demand self-transcendence.

It goes without saying that fun and entertainment are not substitutes for true joy.

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True joy comes from the soul, which is a part of G-d. G-d identifies with joy and wherever we find true G-dliness we find true joy.

The person who has faith and trust in G-d is one who will always be happy and will enjoy well-being in the spiritual, emotional and even physical existence.

One achieves all of the above by study, reflection on G-d and our purpose in the universe. However, the most effective and ideal way to change our attitudes towards life is to engage in **acts** of kindness even as we learn to think positive. Action itself generates the emotions and mindsets that are desirable.

17. Is there a Redeemer? How to get to him? How to bring him? What will he do?

Judaism believes—and it is one of the 13 Principles of Faith—in the Messianic Age that will be ushered in by a human Messiah, referred to as the Moshiach, which literally means “the anointed one.” To understand his role—and it is a “he”—we must first understand the role of the Messianic Age.

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The Messianic Age is when G-d's plan for the universe—to make it into a dwelling place for Him—will be realized.

When enough people over a period of time do enough good and contribute enough holiness to the world, G-d will finally deem the world ready for Him to be present for all to behold. The accumulation of **our** individual efforts will transform the world into an ideal world that will bask in the light of G-d.

Jewish belief is that this New Age does not involve a cataclysmic change that will shatter the universe. Rather it will bring about the actualization of all the positive energies that we have been generating over the last few millennia.

Good is real and can never be erased and therefore accumulates. Evil, G-d created to conceal the good and the G-dly to enable free choice. When the sinner subsequently repents or suffers for his transgression, the evil dissipates.

It may seem that evil is more prevalent, but that is only because the enormous repository of good generated throughout humankind's long

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history rests beneath the surface, so to speak, while the evil that still exists is on the surface. When enough goodness and holiness is generated, the good will finally “burst” out of its container and overwhelm the world.

All of the changes in the world that will occur are all part of a Divine plan. According to the Torah, there are three primary players in the unfolding of the Messianic drama.

First of all, there can be no changes in this world that can occur without the involvement of G-d. It is His direction, inspiration and power that gives us the ability to accomplish anything. Above all, the Messianic Age is G-d’s original plan for the universe. G-d is the “Architect” of the plan.

Secondly, G-d gives us humans the freedom of choice, so that we, of our own accord, will choose to make the world a better world, a G-dly world. Indeed, the entire purpose in creation was that we should transform the world into a “dwelling place for G-d,” through our actions that are in conformity with G-d’s teaching and instructions. When we make enough good and proper choices, the world is then ready for the

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final transition into an Age of Redemption. We are thus the “builders” who implement G-d’s plan

There is also a third element: Moshiach. He is of flesh and blood, born to two human parents in the most natural way. He **must** be human, because the purpose of Moshiach is not to impose G-d’s presence but to aid us in making the right choices, i.e., to invite G-d into the world by choosing to do more good. The one who makes it happen is Moshiach by being a part of us and by bringing out the best in us.

Moshiach, who will make the “Master Plan” a reality—like Moses who was chosen by G-d to transmit the “Master Plan” for the world—is a leader who feels the needs and the pain of the people because he is a part of them. He is human and has to make human choices in his life. His humble nature allows him to be receptive to the Divine. His vision and insight enable him to see not only what the generation needs but also how to meet those needs and particularly how to make the transition into the Messianic Age. When the world is ready, G-d selects the Moshiach, the ideal human being to

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serve as the catalyst for the final transition into the Messianic Age.

Maimonides, based on classical Jewish sources as the Bible and Talmud, states the basic qualifications for Moshiach:

He must be a leader, a descendent of King David, who is steeped in Torah knowledge and totally committed to all of its commandments, engaged in the effort to influence Jews to follow the path of Torah, repair its breaches, fight the wars of G-d, build the Holy Temple and gather the entire Jewish nation to Israel.

Jewish tradition teaches that in every generation there is one person, a great Jewish leader, who is worthy of being the catalyst to bring about the new era. There is a Moshiach in every generation.

In summation: There are three key factors and players in the unfolding of the Messianic drama: First, there is G-d, the Architect of the plan. Second, there is “us,” the players who make the plan work. Third, Moshiach, who is the human leader or “contractor” who helps us realize our potential that will make the final thrust into the Era of Redemption.

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To facilitate the final transition into the era of Redemption, it does not suffice for us to just have faith and be passive about it. We are the key players. We must be pro-active for three reasons:

First, by being pro-active we can hasten the process and alleviate some of the pain that goes along with any transition. Secondly, by being pro-active, we become part of the process, thereby gaining legitimacy by fulfilling the purpose for which we were created. Third, by being proactive we will be adequately prepared and not be overwhelmed by what is to come.

At that time there will be three primary changes:

- a) The rebuilding of the Holy temple in Jerusalem and through it the revelation of G-d to all.
- b) The Jews scattered throughout the world will be brought back to the Promised Land of Israel.
- c) The entire world's population will live in peace with Israel and with one another.

Sounds incredible! On the one hand, It is. But, upon deeper reflection, it is totally within the

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realm of nature to see the world change for the good. Even human nature can and will change.

It actually occurs in several stages. First, because Moshiach will command the respect of all those who hear of him, the world—initially, perhaps, out of fear and awe—will conform to the rules of a civilized society. With his charisma and by example, he will “compel” us to live better and holier lives. The more good we do, the more we express our hidden potential for good, which in turn makes us do more good. We then become conditioned to good, weaning ourselves off of our bad habits.

Jewish sources emphasize that these future events are not going to disrupt our lives. The Redemption is a validation of all that we’ve done right. Whatever we are, our humanity, our identities will not change, just become more complete. We will savor all of what we’ve accomplished prior to the Messianic Age and we will see how our actions now were actually the catalysts for this New Age.

The Messianic Age is a time of discovery; of one’s own and the world’s true and inner potential. Our awareness of reality will be acute;

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we will appreciate each other's true qualities, as we will all be capable of realizing our full potential.

This heightened awareness will lead to a reduction and, ultimately a total elimination, of tension in the world. There will be no more war and strife. Rivalry and greed will disappear and will be replaced with love and devotion to higher knowledge. In the words of the prophet Isaiah "And the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the sea is covered with water."

At that time the lives of all people will be in complete harmony with the so-called "Seven Noahide Commandments," discussed earlier. These laws--originally transmitted by G-d to Noah and his children, and subsequently to the entire human race at Mount Sinai--form the basis for a civilized society. And in the Messianic Age, all the nations of the world will embrace these laws and put down their destructive weapons and convert them for peaceful uses.

In addition, there will be a proliferation of all the material goods. In the words of the great

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Sage, Maimonides, “the delicacies will be as prevalent as the dust of the earth.” Once material needs will not be so urgent, jealousy and strife will also cease.

There will also be a sense of unity; not only in inter-personal relationships, but unity within oneself. Instead of the fragmentation of our lives, being pulled in so many directions, robbing us of our peace of mind, there will be a unity of purpose which will allow us to see how all of our interests stem from one unifying objective: constant growth in our awareness of G-d’s unity.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, the greatest Jewish leader of our century, described (paraphrased in a recent best-seller *Toward a Meaningful Life*) the Redemption thus:

“But what exactly do we need redemption from? From being trapped in the darkness of the material world, which obscures our search for meaning. From a listless and aimless life. From our doubts and fears.”

The belief espoused by the Rebbe is that we are presently standing on the threshold of this age.

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The last century has witnessed momentous and unprecedented events. They include: the Holocaust, the return of Jews to Israel, the miraculous victories in Israel's wars, the collapse of the Soviet Union and other Communist regimes, the miracle of the Gulf war, the deadly scud missiles hardly causing loss to life in Israel, the return of millions of people to G-d and religion, and the tens of thousands of miracles that individuals have experienced.

These and more events which have been predicted by the Biblical Prophets and Talmudic sages thousands of years ago that they were to precede and presage the coming of Moshiach is what prompted many great Jewish and non-Jewish leaders to declare that we are living on the heels of the Messianic Age.

From 1991, the Lubavitcher Rebbe has emphasized that we have entered an even more advanced stage. He repeatedly declared – quoting the Midrash, an ancient classical Jewish work: “The time for your Redemption has arrived!” The Rebbe referred to the imminence of Moshiach as a prophecy and exhorted us to prepare for this event by adding more goodness and kindness.

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The Rebbe spoke of how all that is necessary now is to “open our eyes,” to see the present reality for what it truly is. All the good that the world had to accumulate since its creation for the Messianic process to begin has already occurred. Now, our task is to acknowledge the new reality. We should acknowledge the cataclysmic changes that have occurred in recent years, and translate this awareness into modes of behavior that are more wholesome and G-dly—in short dedication to the Universal principles of the Seven Noahide Laws, in letter and spirit.

Indeed, many Jews and non-Jews believed that the Lubavitcher Rebbe would have been the most qualified leader to be the Moshiach. He made his life’s work, one persistent drive towards Redemption. In spite of his physical absence, many Jews and non-Jews continue to see him as the one who has unleashed the final thrust towards Redemption by serving as the ultimate role model for this new era. The Rebbe spread G-dly knowledge permeated with unconditional love and concern for all to the farthest reaches of the world.

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The Rebbe was the most prolific teacher of G-dly knowledge. In spite of his incredible mastery of all the sciences and humanities, the Rebbe put his greatest emphasis on spreading the teachings of G-d. In the over 200 volumes published to date, and in tens of thousands of letters, the Rebbe sheds light on virtually every facet of religion and life. The Rebbe continues to be the beacon of light to all segments of Jewry and humanity. It is no surprise that the Rebbe received the Congressional Gold Medal.

The Rebbe alerted us to the reality of this “New World” that we are entering into and predicted the recent world events and declared ahead of time that they portend the imminent Redemption. Indeed, many have pointed to the Rebbe’s synthesis of prophetic insight with acute pragmatic sensitivity. It is no wonder that so many of his close followers as well as outsiders of his movement, Jews and non-Jews, have considered him to be the Messiah, the person who activates the spark within each of us that will ultimately change the world for good.

Regardless of how one feels about this issue, it is clear that the Rebbe is the driving force

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now—through our collective efforts—to alert all Jews and non-Jews to the overwhelming significance of our day and age. Our task now is to greet Moshiach, by looking to the role model par-excellence of an ideal G-dly life and to emulate his ways.

The Rebbe exhorted us to ignite the spark of Moshiach in our own lives, by doing more goodness and kindness; by opening our eyes to the new reality; by striving to make our lives more wholesome and complete, by following the Seven Noahide Commandments and disseminating them to our friends and neighbors, in harmony with the Messianic idea of excellence; and to not stop praying for the true and complete Redemption.

18. Perceptions and attitudes toward non-believers and other cultures

Judaism believes, as mentioned above, that every human being was created in G-d's image and is chosen to be a part of G-d's plan for universe. Judaism does not compromise on its values and beliefs just to accommodate the attitudes of others. Any culture that does not conform to the Master Plan as it was given to all of

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humanity, i.e, the observance of the Seven Noahide Commandments, in the eyes of Judaism, has strayed from its G-d given objective.

Any culture, secular or religious, that conforms to these Seven Noahide Laws is viewed in a positive light.

Although, Judaism and the Jewish people were consistently reviled, persecuted and, theologically speaking, at odds with virtually every religious and political system, the world in this pre-Messianic Era seems to be coming closer to Jewish ideals for humanity.

However, even where we disagree, Judaism teaches us how to separate between the person and his or her erroneous beliefs. We believe in getting along with the person even if we cannot agree on theology.

Another salient point is that Judaism does not believe in everything or nothing (with the exception of a person who wants to embrace Judaism, he or she must be prepared to accept it totally). Even if we strongly disagree with another viewpoint held by others we are encouraged to focus on the areas of agreement.

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Western civilization has become more receptive to the ideals of kindness and justice. Discrimination is now considered taboo in these western societies. Charity and random acts of kindness are becoming more common. Totalitarian and imperialistic governments have not vanished but they are the exception not the rule as it was in the past. The U.S. spends billions in aid to poorer countries. Science is coming around to seeing unity in nature, as opposed to the belief in multifarious forces of nature that parallel the polytheistic notions of the past. These are all signs that the world at large is coming closer to the underlying ideal of the Seven Noahide Commandments.

As a general rule, Judaism requires taking care of one's own family and community first, but it also requires that we promote peace and unity with others by reaching out beyond our own borders to assist others. How perfect of a world we would have if every group took care of its own and did a little extra for others outside of their own communities.

Judaism is very strict in demanding loyalty to the host country in which they live. Although Jews will never cease identifying with the Land

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of Israel, it does not detract from their loyalty to the country in which they live.

There is one more caveat. Since the Jewish people are a minority in the world (we are but 1/5th of one percent of the world's population, it is a major challenge for Jews to maintain their individuality, especially when there are cultures that seek to "convert" us to their religion. Even more insidious threats are the secular and hedonistic pressures that threaten to engulf Jews. Tragically, persecution and modernity have taken their toll on Jewish observance among Jews. All this points to the reason why some observant Jews are reticent and are reluctant to socialize and be part of the prevailing culture, even when it is not at odds with Jewish beliefs and observances.

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

JE SUIS JUIF

The Call of the Shofar!

The tragic events of the few weeks are a clarion call – or, in the Jewish vernacular, the “Call of the Shofar”—to the entire world: Wake up!

And, I believe and hope, the world is waking up to something

However, it is crucial that we know what we are waking up to. We must not read the call the wrong way and extract the wrong message.

What is the message?

Do we identify with Charlie?

The answer in one word: Hardly!

Was the attack an attack against free speech and is our response therefore a campaign for free speech?

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Again, the answer is that would be missing the main point.

Surely, the terrorists are against free speech, but it is so much more than that. As important as free speech is there is far more at stake. And if we focus on the lesser evils, or if we conflate them, we will not make any meaningful changes for the good.

Before my analysis let me raise some pointed questions:

What's New?

Why is world more concerned now?

Why what is happening now so radically different from what happened in Israel over the last 66 years; particularly within the last 20 years?

Why are these despicable terrorists worse than Hamas that dances when Jewish children are murdered, or after 911?

And why is this worse than what Abbas, the Holocaust denier, did in the past for his prominent role in the Munich massacres of Israeli Olympic athletes and continues to honor the murderers of children as martyrs?

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Unfortunately, we are living in age of clichés and euphemism. Simply phrasing an evil person's actions somewhat differently changes the entire picture. The Orwellian predictions have come true but not in the pronouncement of some totalitarian government, but by the so-called "free press" and the clueless people who do not hold them accountable for their perversion of the freedom of the press.

The Age of "Narrative"

But worse than the clichés and distorted descriptions of events is that we are living in the "Age of Narrative."

There is no more good and evil, white and black; just my/your narrative. This is far worse than just using clichés and platitudes because you're really in trouble if your narrative doesn't agree with mine! In today's world, anyone who does not fit the political correctness of a certain segment of societal elites is vilified and considered a pariah.

Let me add another question to help clarify the above:

When Israel is attacked by Hamas, they are not terrorists but militants. They are fighting

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because they believe they have a cause of removing Israeli occupation and oppression.

Then, may I ask, why is ISIS not entitled to argue the same: The West is occupying Muslim territory etc., has killed so many Muslims, including innocent women and children as collateral damage, etc.? Why are they branded as terrorists?

Why are they not viewed like George Washington and the Revolutionary War? To the British we were terrorists; while we were liberators to ourselves!

Why when children are murdered in Israel it is ignored or worse? Instead the media blames the victim for its occupation!

The answer: It's the narrative, stupid!

And what is the media's narrative these days?

Modern journalism glorifies victims, the underdog. And it makes no difference who is right or wrong. The media's narrative is to favor the weaker side, the one who better fits the description of the victim.

Today, Israel is the Goliath, because it appears to have overcome the existential threat to its

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existence. And it makes no difference who is right in the conflict with the Arabs because there are no absolutes anymore. Muslims are the new victims and Israel is the new Goliath. And Goliath is always wrong.

Moreover, on a more sinister level that can't be discounted, worship of the weak empowers those who support them and lays the foundation for a new tyranny against all those who are not part of that favored group.

The Roots: Secular Religion

When we trace the origin of this attitude it is rooted in the secular notion of moral relativism. The only evil left is the belief in absolute morality. This attitude that is blind to facts and truth is a fanatical irrational religion, Those who advocate absolute values are demonized, except of course, if they are Muslims who hate Israel and the United States!

My theory, based on the teachings of Kabbalah, is that every human being possesses a need to surrender his or her intellect to a higher trans-rational entity, which we identify as the Creator. This is what we call faith. Faith, by definition, means to transcend logic. When a person has

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no faith in a Deity his or her soul needs to find alternate ways to express religious fervor. The militant atheist is, in truth, expressing his or her need to be religious. Indeed, the people who are so narrow-minded when it comes to viewing other approaches, are usually people who don't have another religion to which they lend unconditional support, so they look for other outlets.

The well-known speaker, Rabbi Yossi Jacobson was discussing the idea of good and evil with an "enlightened" student who, incredulously, to most sane people, couldn't even get himself to decry Hitler as evil. His words went something like this, "Don't get me wrong, I don't like what he did, but I cannot say it is evil!"

Rabbi Jacobson, never at a loss for words, found himself dumfounded and speechless. A while later, Rabbi Jacobson sat down to eat his Shabbos meal which consisted of chicken. When the vegetarian student noticed that he was about to consume meat he exclaimed, "That's **evil!**"

When I heard this story, I thought it might have been apocryphal or exaggerated until I had a

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discussion with a bright law student who essentially made the same argument that there are no absolutes; no absolute good or evil. I didn't want to get into a long and futile debate with a person whose beliefs are so radically different from mine so I changed the subject. Twenty minutes later, I casually mentioned President Bush (who was then the president) and I was shocked by his reflexive outburst, "Oh he's so evil!"

Where it All Began

All of these ills are rooted in the Enlightenment. To be sure, the Enlightenment produced much good. However, because it is man-made and intrinsically secular it has inherent flaws and ultimately has planted the seeds for its own destruction.

One can perhaps compare this to the Golem, the humanoid created by the Maharal out of clay and animated by some mystical power. But it got out of hand and had to be retired. It served a purpose, but, as a man made creation, it also had the potential for its power to go awry.

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In the modern world many have pointed to the advances in Artificial Intelligence as examples of positive innovations that carry the seeds for the very destruction of humanity! This does not mean that innovations, technology and human reasoning is bad. It simply means that if not checked they can degenerate into lethal forms.

Oy Vey; It's Twins!

The Enlightenment produced two diametrically opposite monsters of the 20th century: Nazism and Communism.

I don't mean to suggest that the Enlightenment followers had any such intention of bringing the misfortunes of those two ideologies to the world. What I am suggesting is that when one removes G-d from the equation and bases right and wrong exclusively on human logic, it will inevitably ending up as one of those two ideologies, which are jointly responsible for the murder of over 100 million innocent people.

The Enlightenment is a man-made attempt at replicating Torah Messianic ideals with a philosophy that naively believes that that world can and will evolve into a Messianic utopia for all, based simply on rational thought.

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As a result, the rational mind sought a theory for our existence to replace creation by a Divine Power and came up with the evolutionary theory. This theory itself underwent an evolution or devolution, depending on your narrative, including its elevation/degeneration into social Darwinism and ultimately Nazism. In this perverse ideology the strong must not allow the weak to pull them down and abort the evolutionary process. And all this, according to their narrative, sustains the very foundation of existence. Good is defined by our ability for the fittest to survive. In this evil ideology the strong are worshipped.

Once again, I want to emphasize that there is no suggestion that the proponents of the Enlightenment and the theoreticians of evolution would have countenanced the Holocaust. Nor am I suggesting that the Nazis based their desire to murder six million Jews solely on the basis of their belief in social Darwinism. But, when you see a fruit you know that it got to your table as a result of host of factors: The supermarket staff, the truck driver, the distributor, the farmer, the rain, the earth, the seed, etc. But, it is also clear that there had

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to be someone who cultivated the earth so that it would find fertile ground to grow this poisonous plant.

If Nazism is worship of the strong, the Master Race, Communism, by contrast worshipped weak and focused on equality and protecting the weak at the expense of freedom, among other things. Because there is no G-d in their ideology and everything is materially driven, the only way we can reach the godless Messianic utopia is to make everyone equal. But to create equality they had to take away freedom and even the ability to exercise the traits of kindness and compassion. No longer did the haves have to help the have-nots; government made sure that everyone had, or had not in most cases, equally. Communism stripped the human being of his soul, even as it murdered more people than the Nazis.

Both of these ideologies contain kernels of truth.

While Judaism repudiates in the strongest terms virtually everything Nazism stood for, it does believe that we are evolving into a more sophisticated form of humanity; one that will

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usher in the Messianic Age. This age will come not by waving a magic wand, but by adding on to and thereby increasing the cumulative good of the past, through acts of kindness and goodness.

However, the very evolutionary process which endows us with superior spirituality demands of us to share our largesse with those who have less, materially or spiritually because our evolution comes not by weeding out the weaker but by raising them up to a higher level and doing so by our acts of compassion and kindness. By connecting to the Divine through these Mitzvos we are empowered to change humanity for good.

Torah based Messianism asserts that through the Mitsvos we gradually bring G-dly energy into the world. Man-made energy cannot be beneficial for too long. And therefore, only when we care for the weaker in the context of a G-d based morality can we advance our inexorable push to utopia.

These two competing evil ideologies “borrowed” the concepts from Torah, which is the epitome of truth and goodness. One ideology, on the

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extreme right, adopted the evolutionary view towards the world's developments and perverted it; and the other adopted the view of protecting the weak and creating equality and perverted it,

Both used these kernels of truth for utter evil. Their ideology became the source of their power and unprecedented tyranny.

In the case of the right wing ideology which focused on the evolutionary concept it eliminated anyone who they deemed was an impediment to this evolution such as those who were physically and mentally challenged, and of course, Jews. Jews in particular were not just deemed to be sub-human, Hitler could not tolerate Jewish compassion and support of the poor and weak.

In the case of the left wing communist ideology, religion, particularly Judaism, was deemed to be anti-revolutionary. While anti-Semitism was outlawed in Russia, Jews were hated and punished for being counter-revolutionary and impediments to their perverse version of equality.

No Right and No Left

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In short, man-made ideologies, right, left or center, even when conceived with the best of intentions and with the highest idealist vision, will inevitably degenerate into something less than ideal without being checked by respect for a Higher and Absolute Authority.

The rationale for this simple:

People are egotistical creatures. They are territorial and jealous. The first siblings, Cain and Abel are the best examples of this. Even with the highest ideals, people will naturally degenerate into selfishness. Unless the ego is checked, man is destined to fail. The belief in a Higher Being is not just truth; it is the only force that can humble a powerful human being. A system that leaves G-d out of the equation and relies solely on human reason, ingenuity and ambition will eventually wreak havoc on society. A G-d driven society, at least, has the **potential** to reverse the natural and degenerate human tendencies.

The rejection of both right and left ideologies is hinted in the story of Moses who sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating a slave and kills him. But before doing so the Torah reports, "He

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looked to his right and to his left and saw there is no man.” The famed Rabbi Meir Shapiro of pre-Holocaust Poland interpreted this as a reference to Moses’ searching for solutions to the problems in Egypt and he turned to right-wing ideologies and then to the left-wing ideologies and he realized that there is no man; there is no man-made system that can guarantee justice and righteousness.

And while we defeated Nazism and Communism, there are still remnants of these two ideologies that remain. It attitude that there is no absolute truth and good; it’s only the narrative that counts. And this narrative is becoming less and less respectful of Jewish interests, specifically as it pertains to the Land of Israel.

The Second Prong of Evil: Perverting G-d

We then come to the second prong of evil in the world that is diametrically opposite the narrative, moral relativistic secular world-view. It is the religion that puts G-d at the top of everything—as it should be—and in His name commit the most heinous crimes against humanity and against G-d.

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To borrow part of the mantra we hear recently, these Jihadists have “hijacked” G-d and religion and used it for the same tyrannical ends as their secular and atheistic counterparts, albeit coming from opposite directions.

What is so odious about this particular incarnation of evil is that most evil is perpetrated without G-d’s help. Either a sin is committed a) in the absence of belief in G-d, b) in the absence of one’s awareness of G-d, c) despite one’s belief in G-d, d) to rebel against G-d. The Jihadists commit their crimes **because** of their belief in a G-d.

In one very clear way, this form of transgression is worse than all the others, even the one who seeks to fight G-d and sins spitefully and rebelliously. There can be nothing more dreadful than to commit a heinous crime using G-d as your support and motivation. Dragging G-d into evil is the greatest form of blaspheme.

One can draw an analogy to this form of evil from the story in the Torah concerning Pharaoh summoning the Hebrew midwives, Shifra and Pu’ah’s to kill newborn baby boys. Why did he have to resort to using Hebrew midwives? And

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why did he use the elite midwives Shifra and Puah, whom our Sages identify as Yocheved and Miriam, Moses' mother and sister, respectively? His Egyptian soldiers could have done it themselves.

The answer might lie in the way Pharaoh viewed the power of his adversary. He knew that the women and particularly the midwives possessed the power of life and therefore hope and the potential for freedom. How does one prevail over such power? The answer is simple, harness the most potent power of life and hope to be the ones to destroy life and hope!

This is the evil perpetrated by the Jihadists who have appropriated G-d for the most ungodly actions of destruction. They make G-d an accessory and primary motivator for their evil!

This is why the third commandment of the Ten Commandments is singled out by the Torah as one that G-d will not forgive. Using G-d's name in vain does not seem to be such a horrible crime, why then is it treated worse than murder?

Moreover, the Talmud states that when G-d uttered the third commandment the entire

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world shook. Why this commandment in particular?

Because the worst crimes people commit they do in spite of G-d. As a result, G-d's presence has not been sullied. The world, which derives its sustenance from G-d, is therefore safe and secure no matter how much evil exists because it cannot obscure G-d's power.

However, when one implicates and involves G-d in his or her indiscretion, G-d's power has been compromised and sullied. Consequently the world's stability is undermined because its Divine power is no longer the pure energy.

To summarize all of the above, there are two competing evil forces that have come to a head in recent times:

The first is the belief in narratives in place of truth, relativistic secular ideology in place of an absolute G-d based theology.

The second is the perversion of G-d.

A Marriage Made in Hell

And now, ironically, both evils joined forces. Many in the media, some governments, academics etc., dominated by fanatical secular

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religion, have given support to the most fanatical religious perversion. The irony is magnified when we realize that if these purveyors of radical and perverse religion would have their way, the Jihadists, their first victims would be the ones who give them cover and vilify those who resist their evil.

Perhaps, the tragic attack against the secular irreverent publication was a subliminal message that there is something unholy about that illicit marriage.

Our Response

Our response is to repudiate both fanaticisms and instead be proud Jews who believe in a transcendent G-d who cares for us and demands of us to love our fellow, help the weak and poor even as we remember Him through prayer, Torah study and the observance of all the Mitzvos.

We believe in Divine Providence; nothing happens by chance. The entire world was glued to their screens watching the tragic drama which unfolded at Hyper Cacher, or Super Kosher, as Jews were shopping for the Shabbat. A clear message emerges. Our response to these

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monsters is to repudiate their ideology and behavior by intensifying our own observance of Kashrut, which nourishes the soul and the observance of Shabbat which is how we give testimony that G-d is the Creator of the universe.

These and other resolutions for more good and G-dliness in the world is our response to these atrocities and is the sure way to bring about the Final Redemption through Moshiach.

A Shofar has been sounded for Moshiach! Let's wake up and greet him with positive actions!

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ESSAY FOURTEEN
RESPONSE TO AN ANTI-
SEMITE

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

RESPONSE TO AN ANTI-SEMITE

In brief, the question about marriage to a minor is evidence of a selective of knowledge of the Talmud, and a total lack of knowledge of Talmudic logic and methodology as well as ancient cultural norms.

Talmud: The Talmud makes it clear (*Kiddushin* 41a): Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav and some say it was Rabbi Elazar: “It is forbidden for a man to give his daughter in betrothal while she is a minor, until she matures and says, ‘I desire so and so’”

There is absolutely no other authority in all of Jewish history who disagreed with this opinion.

The reason the Talmud discusses the marriages etc. of minors is because in those days it was common for society to engage in childhood marriages. It was a combination of shorter life span and earlier maturity. Even in the

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nineteenth century is was common for families to marry of their sons and daughters around the age of puberty.

The Talmud deals with both the moral aspect of people's behaviors and the legal aspect. This means very simply: If a man would betroth a 3 year old girl, while that would be immoral and against Jewish law, it was a legally binding union and they would require a divorce to sever that marriage. At no time did the rabbis sanction this type of arrangement despite the fact that it was widespread in ancient societies and was not viewed as a form of sexual deviancy.

Another example of the above is the discussion of polygamy. Although Jewish law did not prohibit it until about 1,000 years ago, it was almost non-existent among the Talmudic rabbis. What is legal does not necessarily mean that it is moral. And what is moral is not necessarily the ideal practice. Most of the Sages went beyond the norm of what was legal and beyond the minimum standards of morality.

As for their "obsession" with sexuality, the Talmud is Divided into 60 volumes. Each one

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discusses a different area of Jewish law. Jewish law governs every phase of life and seeks to address the legal and moral issues in those areas and to provide guidance in every aspect of a person's life. This indeed is what Judaism is all about; not to escape the world and live like a monk but to engage it and elevate it by making every part of life holy by connecting it to a G-dly commandments. Of these 60 volumes there are 5 that deal with all aspects of marriage and divorce. That is about 8%. Of these 5 volumes one can find perhaps 10% that deal with sexual matters in a purely legal context. That means that far less than one percent of the Talmud deals with these issues and not in sensual and lascivious fashion. It is no different from a physician who discusses a woman's anatomy and sexual issues from a medical point of view.

A final point: The way the rabbis treated their wives and women in general is legendary and way ahead of their times. In fact, much more respectful than the norm today. Why don't the critics of the Talmud cite Bava Metzia 59a, for example, where the highest standards of respect for treating a wife are discussed?

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ESSAY FIFTEEN
A WOMAN'S HAIR: A
CHASSIDIC
PERSPECTIVE

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

A WOMAN'S HAIR: A CHASSIDIC PERSPECTIVE

The Torah requires that a woman's hair be covered. What is so wrong with it being exposed? And why is a *shaitel* – which can some times be more attractive than natural hair – more acceptable?

According to Halacha, this requirement is restricted to a married woman. What is the difference between a married woman and a single woman with regard to the laws of covering hair? After all, the laws of tzniut, modesty applies to everyone, whether married or single. Why is covering the hair different?

Chassidic thought explains the need for a woman to cover her hair by referring to the difference between the spiritual makeup of women and men.

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Men: Unbridled Energy; Women: Near Perfection

Men are in possession of unbridled spiritual energy. Their challenge is the challenge of *tzimtzum*, looking for ways to contain and limit this energy. Left unchecked, men are likely to wreak havoc. Thus our sages declare: "Who is a strong person? One who conquers his impulse." For a man to overcome his impulse to satisfy his desire he must muster unnatural strength that goes against his basic nature.

Women are the same spiritual beings men are, except for the fact that they were fashioned by their Creator with the precise amount of spiritual energy needed. By dint of nature, women do not have any excessive spiritual energies with which they cannot cope. Their challenge is not to contain and limit their energies, but to preserve and nurture the Divinity that they possess.

In essence, this dispels the popular notion that men are expected to be aggressive and women are expected to be passive and docile. This misconception derives from confusing their disparate natures with their disparate

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challenges. A man who is naturally an aggressive being is expected to rise above that aggressiveness by conquering his impulse by exercising self-control. A woman whose spiritual energy is just the way it should be cannot afford to remain passive, because that can lead to the depletion of her spiritual energy. A woman must zealously guard that spirituality and aggressively nurture all that is holy.

In simple language this means that men were created imperfect spiritual beings and women were created to be naturally spiritually balanced.

From the Earth, or From a Rib?

One can see this distinction reflected in the way G-d fashioned Eve from Adam. While Adam was created from the earth and only then did G-d “blow” a soul into his nostrils, Eve was created from Adam after he had already received his spiritual energy. It follows logically that with the creation of Eve, G-d had fashioned a more focused being; one whose spirituality is balanced with her physical dimension.

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Femininity is often associated with the earth. In Hebrew, the word Eretz is actually translated to mean “that which desires [to do the will of its Creator.]” This is reflective of the feminine quality that is in a natural state of compatibility with its Creator.

According to some opinions, women are to express their gratitude to G-d by reciting the blessing that ends with the phrase “Who has made me according to His will.” One interpretation of this is that whereas men were not created according to His will – they must struggle to have their bodies conform to G-d’s will – a woman was made that way in the first place. Here natural inclinations are consistent with G-d’s will. This does not mean, of course, that a woman has no free will or cannot sin. It simply means that she has a more natural propensity to doing that which is right and that her greater challenge is to nurture her own spiritual resources and guard them from being depleted and corrupted.

Many will point to the Psalmist’s description of the role of woman as one who is ‘inside,’ in the verse: “All the glory of the daughter of the king is inside.” A superficial reading of that would

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yield a meaning that would prefer that a woman not venture outside her home. The Chassidic interpretation goes much deeper. A woman's glory is her awareness that here spirituality lies within her to a greater extent than it does for a man. She need not look for challenges that take her away from her inner self. Her greatest challenge is to become aware of her inner spirituality and to nurture it.

The Mystical Concept of "Hair"

Our sages of Kabbalah have revealed to us that "hair" is representative of the process of tzimtzum, of a reduced measure of Divine energy. When one is in danger of being overwhelmed by too much power, even if it is holy and positive power, the process of tzimtzum is crucial for one's ability to be able to absorb the energy. Tzimzum, or hair, becomes the instrument of generating positive energies.

If, on the other hand, the energy is already reduced and is precisely measured according to the recipient's capacity, any further process of tzimtzum can have catastrophic consequences. To diminish and filter the positive energies any further is to invite those negative elements that

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can only exist in an atmosphere of reduced spirituality.

A simple analogy of a tailor made suit illustrates the point. When one has a piece of material one has much liberty in cutting and altering it before it will become useless as a garment. However, once something is tailor made for a specific person, one must use much more care before they try to cut it further.

Our sages thus tell us, therefore, that for a woman to expose her hair -- the physical manifestation of *tzimtzum* -- is to reduce her divinely "tailor made" spiritual energies and thus serves as an invitation to the forces of impurity. It is not that a woman should cover her hair because her hair might be attractive and enticing, but that a woman's hair exposed is an invitation to the forces of impurity. Once these forces are unleashed, **all** sorts of negative consequences can ensue. The fact that her natural hair might be enticing to a man is merely *one* dramatic illustration of how a woman's spirituality might be compromised.

This applies only to living hair that expresses the concept of *tzimtzum*, inasmuch as hair,

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notwithstanding its connection to the brain and life force of the person, contains a reduced amount of life. This does not apply to hair once it is removed from the person and is formed into a shaitel. By covering one's hair, in accordance with the Torah's requirements, one is thereby guaranteeing that the woman's spirituality is not depleted and that she can successfully preserve and nurture her Divine identity.

When a woman covers her hair she is thus making a statement about her spirituality and her mission in life as a woman. She is saying, in effect, that she contains an inner spiritual dimension that must be preserved and protected from being depleted or curtailed.

Women are From Malchut; men are From Z" a.

In the terminology of Kabbalah, men are from z" a and women are from Malchut. Z" a or Zeir Anpin represents the emotional attributes of Hashem. Women's spiritual source is Malchut, the Divine attribute that receives the Divine emanations of z" a. To be able to absorb the Divine energies of z" a, there must be a process of tzimtzum, reduction and condensation of the

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original energy of z"ra. Inasmuch as a woman represents Divine energy that has already undergone the process of tzimtzum, any further tzimtzum would actually distort the G-dly energy and enable it to energize even levels of unholiness

For example: When a brilliant teacher wants to impart some profound idea, he has to filter and screen the idea. Sometimes the brilliant teacher might say a witty remark that appears to be devoid of substantive knowledge. In truth, through the witty remark the brilliant sage has captured the essence of what he wanted to impart to the student. Thus, our sages say: "Even the idle talk of the Talmid Chacham needs to be studied."

Now, if the student were to devise an analogy for one of his own ideas, the words would indeed qualify as idle talk and would border on nonsense. Because his own ideas have already been subjected to tzimtzum, any further diminution of the idea would be a misrepresentation of the concept. Similarly, a woman who is the recipient of the Divine energy in just the right measure cannot afford to have her energy further reduced through her

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exposed hair, for that would lead to the corruption of her spiritual identity.

In effect, a woman who covers her hair is making a profound statement about her unique role as the guardian of spirituality. It is a constant reminder that she possesses an internal holiness that is in harmony with her Creator.

Both men and women need reminders of who they are and what their mission is. Men need tefillin and tzitzit to remind them of their obligations. But, these are external symbols and conduits of spirituality. Woman's reminders are internal. But even a woman can benefit from a reminder. The hair covering, even if it is a beautiful shaitel that she must put on to cover her own hair, is a constant reminder for her to look within herself for her G-dly status.

So Why do Men Have to Cover Their Hair?

And whereas the head of covering of a man is to remind him that G-d is *above* him, the head covering of a married woman is designed to make her aware of the G-dly energy that is *within* her. And whereas a man's inner

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spirituality might be the cause of his going astray – for which reason he must cover his head to remind him that there is a G-dly purpose that transcends his own G-dly spirit – a woman’s hair covering is intended to prevent her inner spirituality from becoming depleted. A man must look primarily out of himself for guidance; a woman must look into herself for guidance.

The Single Woman

At this point we might be able to answer the question raised before, if it so important for a woman to cover here hair, why does this not apply to the single woman?

One can give the following explanation based on the foregoing kabbalistic model of Malchut and Z”a. Malchut is the Divine instrument of measured holiness that is precisely the level it must be to bring the G-dly energy to the lower worlds. Thus, any more “tampering” with this measured G-dly light that would subject it to further diminution would cause G-d’s presence to be inordinately concealed and it would thus be an invitation for the unholy forces to thrive.

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Malchut, however, exists on two plains. Malchut in its higher state is in a state of complete receptivity so as to unite with Z'a in the G-dly world of Atzilut (Emanation), before it descends into the lower world of Beriah to give it life. The danger that can derive from the “hair” or tzimtzum condition as it pertains to Malchut is only inherent in the state of Malchut as it enters into the lower world of Beriah. There it lacks the protection of the world of absolute holiness – Atzilut.

One may suggest that the married woman is one who enters the phase of Beriah. She is no longer in the sublime – single state – of Atzilut. A woman is now ready to begin a home with all of the material concerns and burdens that building a home and family entail. It is precisely in *this* state that she needs to guard her inner spirituality that it not be depleted or corrupted and serve as an invitation for unholy forces.

In her single state, however, there is no danger that her hair and its dynamic of diminishing the intensity of her spiritual energy will lead to any harm. The reason for this, one might suggest, is that before marriage a woman is still devoid of her primary earthly responsibilities.

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Furthermore, she is still in her parent's home and under their influence, the spiritual dangers are less threatening. Particularly in light of Kabbalah and Chassidic thought, parents are representative of the two highest attributes of chochma and binah (conception and intellectual development) in whose light there is no evil, because they represent the state of total bittul-nullification in relation to their transcendent G-dly source. When one's spiritual faculties of chochma and binah are dominant, the other attributes are in a state of Bittul and cannot possibly lead to any result that is not in consonance with the Divine will.

Moreover, the state before marriage is analogous to Malchut as it is in a state of receptivity to be united with Z'a. In this mode of receptivity and Bittul, there is no potential for harm. This can be understood in light of the Talmudic principle concerning the kashrut of a utensil that when a vessel is in the process of absorbing it does not exude its contents. Only when Malchut assumes the mode of giving to the lower worlds that it becomes vulnerable.

And thirdly, a subsequent "diminution" will have to take place – her entry into an

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independent home -- and therefore, her hair being exposed – symbolizing the diminution of her G-dly energy level – is not an issue.

Only when she makes her final step “down” into the “real” world, it is at that point that she must not allow her Divine energy level to be curtailed further. Now that she is distanced from her parents and is involved in exuding her energy to the lower world of reality, she is required to preserve and nurture here very precise measure of Divine energy. By preserving that inner divinity, a woman can bring light and holiness to her entire family and environment.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN
SEEING THE OTHER
SIDE

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

SEEING THE OTHER SIDE

The Three Questions

One of the problems that plagues the Jewish community (and, in truth, all of society) is division and discord. This is even more unsettling when it affects the relationship between two Jews working for the same cause of disseminating Torah and Mitzvos.

- a) What is the root cause of division and discord?
- b) Why does it seem that the problem has gotten worse in recent times?
- c) How do we remedy this situation?

Blame the Ego

Chassidic thought puts the blame squarely on our egos which impels us to see everything through the prism of self.

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But, we must still understand, where this ego driven discord derives from considering that the individuals who are conflicted are steeped in Torah and Mitzvos. How could people of such a high spiritual and moral caliber suffer from the same debilitating ego of the average person?

Chassidic thought traces the phenomenon of ego to the two spiritual worlds *Tohu* and *Tikkun* which influence, and are reflected in, our personalities. *Tohu* radiates powerful Divine energy. Each Divine attribute stands alone and cannot integrate with other forces. The attributes of *Tikkun* (correction or perfection), by contrast, contain aspects of the other, even conflicting, attributes. The attribute of *chesed*, kindness, for example, allows for and even incorporates the attribute of *gevurah*, severity, judgment.

The *Tohu* personality, however, does not have the capacity to accept another approach.

The Rebbe¹ attributes the lack of discord of Rabbi Akiva's students, which brought about their demise, to the *Tohu* mindset that could not tolerate conflicting ideas.

¹ *Likkutei Sichos* vol 7, p. 126.

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Tikkun personalities are distinguished by their ability to get along with others; even with those with whom they strongly disagree because their souls are composite souls, where each component of the soul's personality contains elements of the other components..

Intellectual *Bittul*

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn (known by the acronym Rashab) in the famous series of discourses known as *Ayin Beis* [delivered in the years 1912-1916,]² shows us how to identify our ego's role in a conflict, and how to counter it by identifying the source of *Tikkun's* unique compatible nature.

All of this is possible because of *bittul*-self-abnegation, which eschews a monolithic system. Rather, each attribute possesses elements of the other, even opposite, attributes.

This state of *bittul* that affects one's emotions [contrary to their natural egotistical state] derives from the intellect. Genuine intellect is synonymous with the *bittul* mode. Ego is the

² *Hemshech Te'arev*, p. 177.

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antithesis of true intellect, as is indicated by the saying, “every egotist is an imbecile.” Authentic intellect requires unmitigated *bittul*.

The intellectual process involves understanding and grasping something that is beyond yourself. It can therefore instill *bittul* into one’s personality.

Genuine intellect is receptive to, and interested in, going beyond our previous level of knowledge. The intellectual process suffers greatly when there is an ego driven agenda or some pre-conceived and self-serving interest that will color and bias the results of an intellectual inquiry. In that receptive mindset we are no longer ego-centric but “other centric.”

The Rebbe Rashab takes the identification of intellect with *bittul* a step further.

This explains why every intellectual concept can be broken into many disparate and contradictory details. This too is a product of *bittul*.

Not only is the intellect receptive it is also an integrating and synthesizing force. It can process disparate and opposing concepts and viewpoints.

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When one is engaged in a dispassionate analysis of a subject, sans personal biases, he has no problem dealing with disparate and even conflicting ideas. The mind, because of its natural state of *bittul*, can tolerate and assimilate opposite strands of thought. Only when one has an emotional bias for or against a certain idea, will he find it difficult to tolerate different and opposing views.

We now seem to have a solution to the problem of our egos getting in the way of our relationships. Just put our emotions to the side and focus on ideas and be receptive to others and their conflicting views.

But, unfortunately, not all intellects were created equal. Some of the most brilliant people are supreme egotists.

Ego Driven Intellect and Not Seeing the Other Side

The Rebbe Rashab addressed this dilemma:

The intellect of the *sitra achara*, [literally: the other side, referring to the forces of evil and the people who are influenced by them] is [indeed]

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motivated by ego, as is stated [in Proverbs³]:
“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? [There is more hope of a fool than of him].”

The Rebbe Rashab provides a “test” for us to know if our intellect derives from a holy source or from our egotistical Animal Soul.

An ego driven individual will hold on to his opinion and will not yield even a little to the viewpoint of his fellow and entertain the possibility that he is right. By contrast, one who is in the *bittul* mode will consider his adversary’s logic, even if it is diametrically opposite his own viewpoint. Indeed, he might even embrace it if he [after careful and objective analysis] discovers that his disputant is right.

Not being able to see contrary viewpoints and understand what merit they possess is a telltale sign that you are affected by your own ego’s blinders.

A true story:

Two disputants came before a mediator. After each presented his case, the mediator asked

³ 26:12.

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each to present his adversary's case. One of the disputants could not repeat it even after several attempts were made by the other to repeat his claim. Apparently, he lacked the ability to see things in any way that contradicted his own narrative.

If we analyze all of the disputes that plague the Jewish community it boils down to the lack of *bittul*, which, as the Rebbe Rashab analyzed, manifests itself in the inability to see the other's viewpoint.

For an intellectual position to be credible one must be able to argue the other side almost as effectively as the other person himself. Then you know that your judgment is not clouded and your ego is not controlling you.

[Of course, there are some who are afflicted with the trait of *nitzachon*; the obsession to win at all costs; even the cost of being irrational and making their own lives miserable.]

In theory, this approach to resolving disputes sounds great. All one has to do is to see an issue from the other's perspective. However, if one's emotions (read: egos) are so strong, there

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is no guarantee that the individual will be able to pursue this intellectual, ego free, approach.

The Mashpia

The remedy for this is the institution of *mashpia*. The Rebbe⁴ explained that a *mashpia* is a mentor, who can view the issues more objectively because he is not governed by our ego. The “only” qualifications for the *mashpia*, is to be imbued with modesty, kindness and compassion; the three traits in the Jew’s DNA.⁵ These traits insure that his intellect is the receptive and humble one; not the self-centered intellect of the Animal Soul.

[A caveat: A *mashpia* is not necessarily a rabbinic judge who can render final decisions. For that, one must go to a Din Torah (three rabbinic judges), for adjudication. The *mashpia*’s role, even in these cases, is to remove some of the sharp edges and make the person receptive to the other side. The *mashpia* might even obviate the need for a court case by exposing the merit of the other’s position.]

⁴ *Torah Menachem* 5747, volume 2, p. 631.

⁵ Talmud, *Yevamot*, p. See *Likkutei Sichos* volume 30, p. 61.

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Why Now?

A question still remains: Why does it seem that there is more conflict and discord today than in the past?

From the teachings of the Rebbe in this regard, two explanations for this phenomenon emerge.

First, the Rebbe⁶ referred to a troubling phenomenon of recent vintage. Many very good people have revealed an ugly part of their personalities. The Rebbe attributed this to the pre-Redemption phenomenon mentioned in the book of Daniel: “Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined...”⁷ This alludes to the way all hidden matters will come to the fore. The Rebbe explained that we possess hidden talents and powers, both positive and negative, that we may even not know of their existence, and they are now surfacing.

⁶ *Toras Menachem*, 5746, volume 1, p. 540-541. Volume 4, p. 255-258. 5747 volume 2, p. 626-635; volume 4, p. 6

⁷ Daniel 12:10.

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Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai cried on his deathbed⁸ because he didn't know where he was going. The Rebbe explained⁹ that Rabbi Yochanan was so troubled because although he knew all of his life's positive accomplishments he never had an opportunity to introspect and thereby discover hidden negativity lurking in the subconscious layers of his soul.

The Rebbe concluded that right before the Redemption these hidden forces, both good and bad, emerge into the open, to provide us with our last opportunity to come clean with all layers of our personalities.

To deal with these newly emerging negatives, the Rebbe counseled, we must have a *mashpia*-mentor imbued with modesty, kindness, compassion.

Introducing the Light of *Tohu* into the Vessels of *Tikkun*

The Rebbe makes this point in a somewhat different fashion by referring to the challenge of our age: It is "to fuse the powerful energies of

⁸ *Berachos* 28b.

⁹ Based on *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra* 50d.

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the world of *Tohu* with the ample and receptive vessels of the world of *Tikkun*.”¹⁰

As we anticipate the imminent Redemption, we have already been bombarded with unprecedented, spiritual “nuclear” *Tohu* rays of the future, which makes it very difficult to be receptive to approaches incompatible with our own, for as was mentioned earlier, the energy of *Tohu* is the cause of division.

But, the fact that we were given this challenge dictates that we have the wherewithal to “square the circle” and become receptive to these transcendent forces of *Tohu*. We should not look at the social problems we face today as intractable and a sign of our failure to tame our unbridled egos. Instead, we should view this as society’s ultimate challenge to synthesize the two opposite thrusts of *Tohu* and *Tikkun* as our way of ushering in the Messianic Age.

Bittul and then Bittul

How does one begin?

¹⁰ See *Likkutei Sichos* volume 35 (*Vayeira* (b). *Sefer HaSichos* 5751 28th Nissan.

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The Rebbe explains¹¹ that Torah is a composite of both thrusts: *Tohu* and *Tikkun*. Torah uplifts us to higher spheres and brings us back down to earth. Torah is harmony which creates the ultimate balance between conflicting attributes. Within Torah itself, the subject of Redemption is most suited to introduce the sublime energy of *Tohu* into the receptive vessels of *Tikkun*.

But, for Torah to succeed in this fusion, one must approach Torah study with a modicum of humility.¹² And while we need Torah to achieve *bittul* and synthesis, we also need *bittul* for Torah to bring about synthesis. So where do we start?

The answer is that there are different levels of *bittul*. We begin, by "bending" ourselves to conform to the Torah's perspective even if it does not fit into our agenda. Once attached to Torah's synthesizing power, it instills within us a more profound *bittul*; one which allows us to see the larger picture and not be caught up in foolish ego driven politics.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Likkutei Torah*, Vayikra 23c. Cited in *Sefer Hasichos* ad loc.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

**G-D AND THE
HOLOCAUST: WHAT IS
THE QUESTION?**

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

G-D AND THE HOLOCAUST: WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

Where was G-d during the Holocaust? How could let it happen? How can one believe in a G-d that allowed Auschwitz? These and similar sounding questions are some of the most painful questions that have ever been asked; questions for which no satisfying answers have been given. And if we posit that there can be no answer to this question, then we must ask ourselves, should we continue to ask the question over and over again just to be told that we cannot fathom the unfathomable? What positive outcome can there be from the experience of frustration that we have when we reach this theological impasse?

To help us deal with this issue, I think it is imperative that we define the question, or, to be more precise, the various shades of the

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question. It appears to me that there are at least five different shades to the question. The first two are not really questions but emotional expressions. Of the latter three “intellectual” shades, there are good satisfying answers to the first two, but alas, it is the third intellectual question that must remain unanswered. But, by leaving that shade of the question unanswered, it compels us to then once more resort to asking the emotional shade of the question, to which only G-d can respond.

Let us define the first two forms of the question that we labeled “emotional.” An emotional question is not really an attempt at seeking certain information as is an intellectual question. Rather it is an adult subterfuge. Instead of breaking down and venting our emotions by crying over the destruction of Jewry during the Holocaust, we express our pain and anguish with a more adult looking question: Where were You during the Holocaust? This is not a question that begs an intellectual answer. This is the child in us who cries to his mother when he hurts himself and does not seek a rational explanation for his pain, but a kiss and warm caress from his mother.

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Instead of expressing one guilt feelings for less than adequate behavior or faith, one couches the guilt in a question by asking “Why should I believe in G-d, if He permitted the Holocaust to occur?” This individual – whose guilt we all share in some measure – does not want an answer to his question. Any answer that would make sense would only enhance the feelings of guilt for not having sufficient faith in and commitment to G-d. By faulting G-d we find some justification for our own actions.

This individual needs to be told that, there is no need to feel guilty. You do believe. Your heart is open and receptive to G-d and His commandments. If not, you wouldn't be feeling this guilt. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. When one ceases to feel pain it is a dangerous sign of paralysis. Guilt is the sign that there is a sense of keen sensitivity to G-d. To question G-d – in whatever form – is a sign that G-d exists in some degree within the hearts and minds of those who question. When the guilty will be told that they need not feel guilt, but that they could assuage their guilt by enabling their hungry souls to imbibe the G-dly

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spirits of Torah and Mitzvot, these emotional outburst will no longer be necessary.

But there are legitimate forms of the question. The first “philosophical” challenge to belief in G-d goes something like this: How could there be a G-d if the Holocaust occurred?

This question can be answered quite easily. If G-d would be defined as one who does not allow the Holocaust to occur, then its occurrence would dispute His existence. But, in the Jewish tradition of G-d, G-d does leave room for suffering and Holocaust. All one has to do is to peruse the Biblical and Talmudic literature for numerous references to these horrific events that were predicted.

The second version is somewhat more sophisticated. Although it can be broken into several parts, its central message goes like this? What was G-d’s role in the Holocaust? Or more colloquially: Where was G-d during the Holocaust? This question can be answered in many ways. I will mention only one, the one that I heard from hundreds of Holocaust survivors. “G-d was with me.” “The mere fact that I was able to survive, against all odds,

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demonstrates that G-d was at my side all the time, making events happen so that I could go free.”

Our problem begins with the third and final form of the intellectual question. It can be phrased independently, or it can come as a follow up question to the preceding one. Let us use this form of the question here. “If G-d was with you and saved you, why did He not do the same to the millions of other innocent people? Why did He let little babies be burnt and shot by the German monsters? Why didn’t G-d intervene?”

All attempts at finding answers to this question that can satisfy any thinking person has been futile. Only people who want to be religious and feel some discomfort because of the Holocaust can be prepared to accept a rationalization that would justify the horrific events of the Holocaust. To them I say, there is nothing wrong with the discomfort you feel knowing that the Holocaust happened.

I will not go through the many attempts at finding reason in an area that is clearly beyond reason. I will propose that when we reach this

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impasse it is the signal to us to revert to the emotional form of the question, which is our expression of pain and anguish. It is also is not so subtle a request, nay a demand of our Heavenly Father to take us into His embrace and bring an end to all pain and suffering, by bringing us Moshiach and the Redemption.

Only in the Messianic Age, that is characterized in Jewish mystical literature as the age when the impossible will be come possible, the transcendent will become immanent, the Supra-rational will become rational and the overwhelming forces will become internalized will it be possible for us to fathom the unfathomable. By repeatedly asking the question and then realizing that there is no answer we are compelled to cry out "*Ad Masi*-How much longer?" How much longer does the world have to endure irrational suffering? This prayer, demand and protest is music to G-d ears and "compels" Him to take charge as the Conductor of the ultimate Symphony that will make all the disparate cacophonous sounds blend into beautiful harmony.

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At that time, the prophet declares – and only then – we will be able to say and sing: “I thank you G-d for having chastised me.” (Isaiah).

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN
GRADUATION AND
MOSHIACH

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

GRADUATION AND MOSHIACH

Every transition from one level to another, by definition, consists of both the level from which one is graduating, as well as the level to which one is ascending. This is true for the transition in all three areas which make up all of existence: olam/world/space, shana/year/time and nefesh/soul/life, the acronym for which is ע"ש"ג. When a Jew travels from outside of Eretz Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael, s/he is simultaneously leaving a place which is tamei and entering a place which is holy. When the Shabbos begins, we simultaneously take leave of the weekday and enter into the Shabbos. And similarly when a person graduates from one level of learning or spiritual advancement to another, they are simultaneously leaving - and hence relating to - the lower level, and rising to - and hence being connected to - the higher level.

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Because of the dual character of transition, it can be one of the most traumatic and confusing experiences. When the Jews left Egypt and entered into transition, they were confronted by doubts: *הייש ה' בקרבנו אם אין?* . As a result, they were attacked by Amalek who sensed their vulnerability. In spite of all the nisim the Jews witnessed at Yetzias Mitzraim and in the desert, there were frequent expressions of doubt.

The time period linking the weekday and Shabbos is also known for the anxiety it generates in many a Jewish home. Our sages therefore admonish us to make sure that we give instructions about lighting the Shabbos candles in a soft-mannered way so as not to provoke a conflict. At that time of transition, we are very vulnerable.

Conversely, because it unites two opposite places/times/levels it must possess a singular power which transcends both sides. As Chassidus explains that the power to unite two opposites must derive from an even more transcendent force, compared to which the two opposites cease to represent obstacles to one another. Once more let us refer to the transitional period in the desert.

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Notwithstanding all of its shortcomings, G-d chose to give the Torah to Bnei Yisroel in the Midbar, not in Eretz Yisroel. It was the period of transition which brought the world its greatest revelation.

We are now living in a transitional period. The Rebbe has told us that "we are standing on the threshold of Geulah." A threshold is the transitional state between the outside and the inside. In Halacha there are questions as to whether the threshold is considered as the inside of the house or the outside, because, as a bridge between two locations, it shares the characteristics of both.

We are now thus living in a very confusing time, because it comprises the features of Galus and Geulah simultaneously! On one hand we witnessed the greatest miracles associated with Geulah in the Gulf War, in the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the Rebbe pointing out how each of these and other changes were signs of Geulah. Yet, on the other hand, we went through the two chof-zayin Adar's and a Gimmel Tammuz. The situation in Eretz Yisrael, where its very survival is threatened, appears to be a sign of the darkness of Galus we are still

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in. There are so many different ways people are looking at the situation. There are many doubts and tragically, conflicts.

Yet, we must bear in mind that a transitional period is also one that combines the two points that it links. To meet the challenge now is our way of accessing the incredible Divine energy a transitional period can generate. By looking ahead, by living a Geulah lifestyle now, even as we are shrouded in the darkness of Galus, we successfully reveal the mystery and the mystical power of transition. By remaining steadfast in our emunah that *הגיע זמן גאולתכם*, and that all the Rebbe told us prophetically will transpire imminently, and living our lives accordingly, permeated with Ahavas Yisroel, we will have met the extraordinary and perhaps unprecedented challenge, this threshold period has for us.

The Rebbe has frequently told us that every individual's experiences and positive changes are a catalyst for universal and cosmic changes for the good. At a time of our own personal graduation, we must be aware of the fact that we as individuals are going through our own personal transition, from one level of Torah

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knowledge and life to another. It can be traumatic, especially when this transition represents taking leave of one continent, crossing the International Date Line, to another continent. We should be mindful, however, that by realizing the unique opportunity this transition provides for, and when we meet the challenge, by looking forward in our own personal lives, this will be the catalyst for the collective "graduation" of all Jews and the entire world from the state of Galus to the state of Geulah.

And conversely, by connecting our graduation with the graduation of the entire world, we will see how our private experience is actually a reflection of a much greater phenomenon - the phenomenon of Geulah. This realization, that what we are doing both reflects a greater cosmic state of Geulah as well as the catalyst for it, can only enhance the feelings of simcha and dispel the anxieties and doubts we have at this very momentous time. And, it is the Simcha which we experience, that will break through the final barrier which separate us from the complete Geulah and our ability to see the Rebbe with eyes of flesh. May we see its

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realization immediately with the Rebbe at our head -

ESSAY NINETEEN
JUDAISM'S
CONTRIBUTION TO
MEDICINE

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

JUDAISM'S CONTRIBUTION TO MEDICINE

With the explosion of scientific discoveries in all fields, particularly in the medical sphere, in recent times, it behooves us as Jews to reflect on the significance of these discoveries in a Jewish context. Our Sages of the Kabbalah and Chassidic thought have described these explosions of knowledge as portents of the imminent Era of Redemption that will be characterized by the utter opening of all the secrets of G-d and nature. The Era of redemption is also the Era of ultimate Healing and physical and spiritual health.

If medical discoveries are features of G-dly revelation, we can appreciate that Torah, G-d's authoritative word, and the Jewish people, G-d's Chosen nation, have something weighty to offer to the progress of medicine.

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When most people think of Jewish contributions to medicine they either think of the high medical costs they pay to Jewish physicians, or, more seriously, they think of people like Jonas Salk and other Jewish medical pioneers. Others might invoke the obsession Judaism has with hygiene that is tangential to observances such as kashrut, Mikveh, circumcision, washing hands before eating etc.

The truth is that Judaism can lay claim to a much more significant contribution to progress in the medical field than either the accomplishments of Jewish medical savants such as Salk or the beneficial by-products of Jewish observances.

Our sages tell us that the prayer for good health is the eighth segment of the “Eighteen Benediction (*Shemonah Esrei*)” liturgy. Jews recite thrice daily. Why number eight, the Talmud asks? Because circumcision, a medical procedure, occurs on the eighth day, the Talmud answers.

There is a profound message in the association of medicine with circumcision and the number eight. Eight is the number that connotes

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transcending the natural order of things, represented by the number seven, the number of days of the week, reflecting the Biblical cycle of creation. When there is an imbalance of nature, one must go to a force that transcends the natural order to heal that imbalance. Moreover, nature, by definition is inherently imperfect and is subject to the law of entropy. To overcome the natural propensity of nature to disintegrate, one must access the above-nature Divine energy that G-d also invested within this world.

Interestingly, the word for sick in Hebrew “choleh” numerically adds up to 49 (7x7), which symbolizes that natural forces, by definition, are prone to deterioration and degeneration. One must therefore access the number eight, the force of transcendence. The healing process, thus, is a Divine process that G-d invested into nature to help cope with the entropy oriented condition of natural existence. In this context, Judaism views medicine not as a contravention of G-d, but an affirmation of G-d’s ability to endow nature with the qualities that are

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inherently above the limitations of the natural order.

And this leads us to the first of the **eight** contributions of Judaism to medicine (an **eight** letter word!) that is alluded to in the “M” of the word medicine: the “**M**iddle-of-the-Road” approach to the concept of man attempting to alter nature, Judaism has adopted. One prevalent extreme position repudiated by Judaism is the view that medical intervention is blasphemous because it purports to change that which G-d had caused. The other extreme, just as objectionable by Judaism’s standards, is the denial of G-d’s role in the entire healing process, claiming that only science can discover the answers to our medical woes. Judaism considers both positions erroneous, theologically untenable, and injurious to our physical and spiritual health. Both extremes deny G-d’s unity. True, only G-d can heal; but G-d heals through His creations that include the physician, the medications and the technological know-how, all of which are G-d’s handiwork. To believe in medical treatment and the scientific process as G-d’s means of healing, is an affirmation that

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everything in creation is nothing but an extension of G-d's unity.

But, Judaism also contributed the “E” of medicine, the empirical approach. Judaism, with its obsession for action, and that action validates the good and noble thoughts, cultivated an attitude that theories, no matter how logical and compelling they sound, can be false. Conversely, ideas that may seem irrational should be adopted if they work. Maimonides (1135, 1204) actually demonstrated this empirical bent in his medical writings where he generally followed in the Greco-Roman tradition of Hippocrates and Galen, but deviates often enough from their prescriptions that they considered logical, when they didn't work in the laboratory of life. Conversely, Maimonides incorporated superstitious remedies, discarded by the medical establishment because of their irrationality, because he tested them and they worked.

“D” stands for the disproportionate number of doctors and other medical practitioners that the Jewish community has contributed. According to a medical historian, there were more Jewish doctors up until modern times than all other

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doctors combined! The reason for this phenomenon lies in the Jewish religion's positive assessment of the medical profession and views the medical practitioner as an instrument of G-d, in whose hands He has entrusted life and death.

"I" stands for the spirit of inquiry Jewish tradition has engendered and the investigatory techniques Jewish scholarship has provided. No progress in science can be made without the ability to probe, question, analyze and be prepared for new discoveries that can revolutionize the way we look at the subject. The Talmud and its commentaries are the most powerful sources of such inquiry that has carried over into the sphere of science and medicine.

The "C" represents the obsession Jews have with compassion for others and the conscientiousness with which they execute their passion for helping others. Indeed, at the forefront of most movements for social change one can find Jewish people, who might not express their Jewishness in any other way. The last Jewish trait to fall to the wayside is the penchant for kindness to and concern for

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others. This concern has certainly helped in furthering the aims of the Medical community.

The second “I” of the word medicine stands for the inestimable value of life and the indivisible character of life. Despite the erosion of this value in modern life with the cliché that it is the quality of life that is most important, Judaism unwaveringly declares life itself to possess the greatest quality; any and every component of life is imbued with infinite value and meaning.

The letter “N” stands for the natural approach to healing. And natural does not necessarily mean to negate synthetic drugs or invasive surgical procedures, but to underscore the importance of preventative measures to secure optimum health. As Maimonides, after prescribing a health regimen, declares that one who follows his prescription, he guarantees will never become ill. Living a healthful life is the best cure in the spirit of the Biblical phrase: “All the illness that I visited upon the Egyptians I will not visit upon you, because I am G-d your Healer.”

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The second “E” of medicine and its final letter represents Judaism’s concept of treating the entirety of the human being; an approach that we refer to as “holistic” medicine. Judaism, especially as expounded by Maimonides, demands that we treat the entire human being, who consists of one whole body, not just a conglomeration of limbs; emotions and intellect. But, above all, the Jewish holistic approach demands that we also treat the soul and the spiritual needs of the individual. The entirety concept also extends to one’s environment. It does not suffice to treat a sick individual without providing him/her with a healthy environment for both his/her soul and body.

These eight perspectives that were inspired by thousands of years of Jewish life and scholarship have influenced – directly or indirectly – the attitudes of the medical and scientific communities, and have brought us perhaps as close as we can get to conquering illness, that will serve as a prelude to the time when G-d, the ultimate Healer, will crown all of our efforts at eradicating sickness with complete success – in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY NINETEEN
THE UNIQUENESS OF
JEWISH ETHICS

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ESSAY NINETEEN

THE UNIQUENESS OF JEWISH ETHICS

Ethics is what distinguishes the symphonic world of order from the cacophonous world of chaos. Whatever ethical system one follows, its objective is to introduce order and harmony into one's life and into one's world.

But, ethical systems, similarities notwithstanding, have different foundations. It is important that we understand the foundational basis of Jewish ethics and how it distinguishes itself from other forms of ethics.

Let us begin with a discussion of the foundation of *all* ethical systems. They are invariably based on one of three premises: intuition, mutual self-preservation or Outside authority. To put it in somewhat original terms and to coin some new terminology: In-tuition, co-tuition or Out-tuition.

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Systems that are based on intuition believe that ethics are innate to the human condition and the universe. Some describe this as “Natural Law.” Accordingly, all one has to do is to probe beneath the surface and block out all of the static and unwarranted distractions to find the inner message that tells us how to live our lives harmoniously and morally. Eastern religions and modern New-Age philosophies are known for their adherence to this “looking inside” to find meaning, system of harmonious life.

The beauty of this system of ethics is that it involves the individual. It is not superficial and despotic. Ethics do not command but are in complete harmony with one’s most inner self. Ethical life liberates the person rather than overwhelms the person. Moral behavior is redeeming rather than suffocating.

The inherent deficiency of this system, however, is that it is subjective, and cannot be validated by any outside criteria.

But the most disconcerting aspect of this system of ethics is that it is almost impossible to discern between the inner voice of one’s conscience, or the viewpoints that have been

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absorbed as a result of an insidious indoctrination process. When we express an opinion about a moral issue, we must be very cautious when we think our opinion is based on some innate sense of right and wrong. It is possible that it is a product of a message from the popular media that was integrated into our system consciously and subliminally. How many hours of exposure to Television, and other media outlets that indoctrinate as much as they educate, have we been exposed to, that may shape and mold our way of thinking that is absolutely not connected to any inner truth or consciousness?

The second foundation of some ethical systems is the sense that only when we behave ethically can we all survive on this planet. Ethics is thus defined as the way to behave that will ensure mutual existence and well being. This “co-tuition” approach to ethics, is what spawned word and concepts like “cooperation” and “co-existence,” both of which suggest respect for the existence of the other, which, in turn, ensures that others respect us. The strength of this approach is that it guarantees proper conduct even when individuals are not in touch

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with their inner selves, their conscience. One does not have to be spiritual to want to live and prosper. It takes but my self-preservation instinct combined with simple logic to realize that if I steal and kill for my selfish interests, the other people can also do the same to me, in their pursuit of their selfish interests. Thus, for our collective good we must have an ethical system that will ensure all of our survivability.

But, this system has its own flaws. Selfish interests are often blinding. They often distort our judgment and make us think that our destructive behavior will not be detected or will go unpunished. In addition, the mere knowledge that a certain act is wrong because it is self-destructive does not guarantee that the individual imbued with this knowledge will not act immorally. In Kabbalah we are told that the narrow passage between the mind and the heart called the neck represents the natural occlusion that does not allow the mind's perceptions of reality "descend" or translate into one's emotions and actions.

Many will therefore point to the absolute necessity for the third foundation of ethics, which is the Outside authority. In simple

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language this refers to a G-d given system of ethics that comes from a source that is impeccable and absolute, that imposes itself on our minds, hearts and actions.

But even this third system cannot guarantee complete success. Even within a system that bases itself on the belief in a G-d and revelation, as is the premise of virtually every religious ethical system, there can still be a serious lacuna in this system's efficacy.

The Talmud cites the irony in the case of the thief who prays to G-d as he stands on the threshold of the house he is about to break into and enter. Why would a person who believes in G-d – as is evident by the fact that he stopped to pray – act contrarily? Is he a hypocrite? Obviously not. There are no observers to his act of piety that he might be trying to impress. The only explanation for this anomalous behavior is that faith – and even sincere, profound faith – does not necessarily translate into action. Faith exists on the periphery of our psyche, while understanding, emotion and action constitute its inner substance. In mystical terminology we can put it this way: Faith rests in the core of our souls; it will not necessarily express itself

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onto the outer layers of our personalities which govern our actions.

And here is where the eclectic nature of Judaism's ethical system manifests itself. Jewish ethics are predicated on all three premises. Judaism does not allow its ethical message to be directed towards us through the channel of G-d's authority alone. To be sure, Judaism *is* based on the belief that the Torah – the embodiment of Judaism's ethics – was given to us by G-d Himself at the revelation at Mount Sinai. Judaism does ask of us to surrender our minds to G-d and accept the Torah even when it appears to go against our intellect. But Judaism also asks of us to nurture our soul's appreciation for the Mitzvot. Moreover, Judaism – especially its mystical dimension – asserts that our soul has a natural propensity and proclivity towards the Mitzvot. They are not only derived from a Supra-Rational G-dly source, but that G-dly source is also internalized within us at the core of our soul. We must therefor perform the Mitzvot with every fiber of our being.

But Jewish ethics provides us with the third system as well. Judaism demands of us to

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develop a social consciousness, one that will compel us to act ethically even when we are not receptive to the voice of Sinai, when our soul's inspiration is stifled and we cannot consciously feel our soul's cry for more moral and G-dly behavior. Judaism does not give up on us. It has provided us with the skills to live ethically, even when our ethical antennae do not pick up the signals from without or within. We have been conditioned to act morally and responsibly, because Judaism has also conditioned us to be socially conscious.

These three ethical engines of Judaism can perhaps be represented by the three categories of commandments we find in the Torah: The *Chukim* (Supra rational commandments) *Eidot* (testimonials) and *Mishpatim* (rational civil laws).

While the *Chukim* jolt us into obedience, the sentimental and spiritually oriented *Edot* nurture and arouse our soul and the *Mishpatim* mold our social consciousness. Together they form a “threefold bond that will not unravel quickly.”