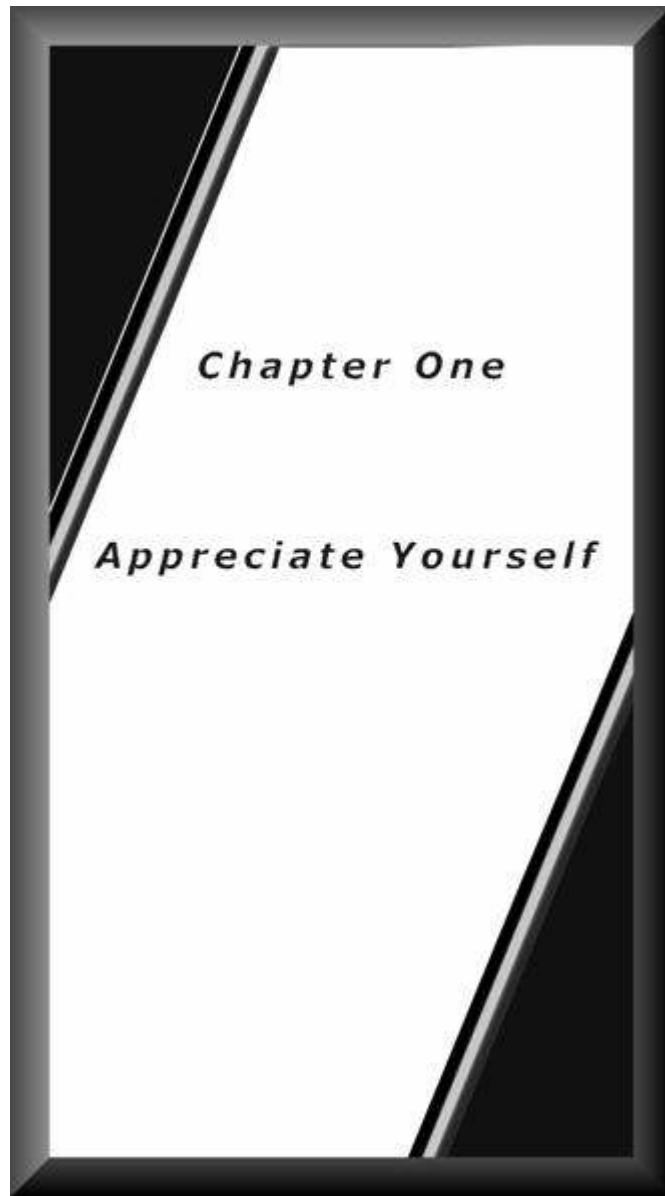


Chapter One – Appreciate Yourself



Chapter One - *Appreciate Yourself*

The Talmud tells us that G-d created the entire universe and then placed one person in the Garden of Eden to teach us that “everyone should say, ‘For my sake, the world was created.’”

But it is not easy to fulfill this obligation. Life bears down on us until most groan, making it hard to remember and believe in our inherent value. Can there be a greater challenge than this: for a human being, most likely struggling under the pressures of this life, to comprehend that the entire universe was created just for him? If any of us could accept this idea, could we say it out loud and really believe it? And, if we believed it, how could we possibly continue to be as anxious, as pressured and as frightened as we are by our daily challenges?

Perhaps, on a good day, our sense of importance can be sustained by the love of our parents, the respect of our children, the company of our friends, the joy and satisfaction of our work. But all of this is so temporal, so transitory, dependent on circumstance and the whim of individuals. The value of a person, as taught by the Talmud, does not rely on any of that. It is an importance rooted in the Will of G-d. It is an importance more permanent than the mighty stars and flowing seas. Who among us can imagine it? Who then can say, “For my sake the world was created” and mean it?

A human being, however, is not just a creature dependent on others to determine his value. A human being possesses an essential value of Divine origin. A human being must daily awaken a new awareness of his fundamental worth. He does this by having faith in Creation and its message. He does this by accepting a definition of human value that transcends the transitory circumstances of life and accesses the source of life, where G-d’s love of human beings blazes with infinite holiness. This love and light is the source and destination for all of us.

Ultimately, we are either important because one human being is important, or the entire human race is irrelevant. Yes, irrelevant, because if even one human being is considered anything less than essential to Creation and the Divine Will, than the

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fleeting glory or status achieved by any other person is no more substantial than a leaf tossed about by the breeze.

G-d created people to live in a world of tests, where shame, failure and destruction prevail. Our test is to exist in this kind of environment and yet look beyond it, to our source, and to understand our travail in higher terms. Something inherent inside of us can guide us there. If we listen carefully, we will hear its message.

In all five books of the Torah (the Law of Moses), there is one principal lesson: human beings are of great value.

Genesis, for example, begins with G-d creating the world for the sake of one person. The Talmud says, “Every person must say, ‘For me the world was created.’”ⁱ Man, a breath of heaven encased in a clay vessel, is important to G-d. Now that is true value!

Note that the Talmud tells us that each person must say, “For me the world was created.” It is not enough to simply know we are important. We must say it. We must say it repeatedly. Every time we say it, every time we think it, we will appreciate ourselves more. In coming to appreciate ourselves, we will also come to appreciate, more than ever, all people.

G-d created us because we are important to Him. Why else would He do it? What we do with our lives, spiritually and materially, depends greatly on whether we accept this idea.

Okay. So we believe we are important, correct? In reality, believing this is much harder than we think. In fact, nothing is as difficult. It is just not in our physical nature to glow with the confidence that we are G-d’s glory. And, this is but one obstacle to believing in our value. There are more.

G-d created an entire cosmos and then put a person in it. Who can understand this? King David cried out to G-d, “When I see Your heaven, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You established: what is man that You should remember him and the son of man that You should notice him?”ⁱⁱ Why G-d created people is a mighty mystery.

In theory, perhaps, we can accept the dignity of man. In real life, however, we very often feel the opposite.

Job cried out in his suffering and despair, “What is man that You should make him great and that You should think of him?”ⁱⁱⁱ And furthermore, “What is man that he be meritorious and how can

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one born of woman be righteous?”^{iv} Our lives are so often filled with pain that it is difficult to feel important.

Thus life itself, especially the times of bitter exile, agitate against the theme of Creation and the importance of people.

The Book of Exodus begins with the Israelites becoming slaves in Egypt. “And these are the names of the Sons of Israel who came to Egypt.” Here too the theme is the importance of people, even as they suffer.

People go into exile to become slaves and yet the Torah emphasizes that they have names. The Bible here assures us that nothing can take our names from us. Nothing can deprive us of our innate dignity and distinction. But does the experience of being in exile not come to conceal our value?

Exodus begins with the idea that exile and struggle bring out a person’s name or spiritual potential. The word “exile,” in Hebrew *galut*, is related to the Hebrew word “*gal*,” which means “reveal.” Exile and struggle *reveal* our unique human essence or name.

Creation forms a person. Struggle makes his name, the self-actualized person. A name is the accumulated efforts we make to build ourselves up through life, and in spite of difficulties. We are our struggles.

The first two books of the Bible paint two quite different pictures of humankind. In the Creation story, Book One, we learn of the great stature of people created by G-d in the Garden of Eden. In Exodus, Book Two, we read of human failure and suffering as Israel descends down into Egypt to become a nation of slaves. Both scenarios, the elevated and the lowly, feature the same G-d and His same handiwork, man. Both books attest to the greatness of the human being.

Ultimately, we will see that the darkness of exile and the joy of liberation are both for our good. The Rabbis teach, “We must bless G-d for the good and also for the bad.”^v How do we do that? Why would G-d, who is perfectly good and who wants only perfect goodness, make a world of darkness and pain? Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzatto explains, “G-d wanted a complete goodness so that there would not be any embarrassment for those who take it from Him.”^{vi} Thus, G-d created challenge and difficulty. If we surmount them, we can receive our portion with dignity, not shame. This dignity is our “name,” fashioned in a world of tribulation, but directly connected to Creation and human glory.

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What is the next phase in human history after the Garden of Eden and Egyptian bondage? In Leviticus, the Jewish people – having completed a cycle of human triumph and decline, having been through exile – approach G-d directly and know Him. Remembering that “exile” (*gal*) implies “revelation,” we can understand why exile works to both reveal the essence of the people who overcome it and to reveal G-d to them.

Leviticus, the third book of the Bible, begins: “And He (G-d) called to Moses.” In this utterance, we have the ultimate affirmation of human dignity. G-d calls upon a person. From this we learn that human beings were not created solely for the majesty of the King, but are distinct and separate from Him. Human beings are truly children to G-d. He wants their prayers, their thoughts and their love.

Lest we think that only people like Moses merit this kind of attention, a fourth book in the Bible begins with the counting of the entire community. Numbers opens in the Sinai desert with G-d’s command to Moses to “count the heads of the entire community.” Here the word “heads” refers to not the leaders, but to each and every person. The Torah thus counts each individual, teaching us that society should not subsume the individual.

Note that in Numbers we don’t count people. Rather, we count “heads.” The head connotes importance. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for “count” is *seoo*, which means “to lift up.” A census is necessary not only for the sake of society at large. We see here that it serves also to encourage and ennoble the individual. It raises his head and elevates his value in the eyes of others.

Deuteronomy, the last book of the Bible, begins, “And these are the words that Moses spoke.” A human being speaks and his words become part of the Bible itself. Such is the power and import of an individual person. Not only do people build this world, they build the Torah!

However, people do not have the power to make themselves or others intrinsically significant. We can only assign importance to a person relative to other people. (They are far better than you. You are not quite as good as him.) G-d alone can confer intrinsic value on human beings, judging them relative to heaven, a standard which is independent of all people and things. The Sages tell us that G-d created people to benefit them and that people must imitate G-d and benefit others. “Just as G-d is kind and merciful,

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so must you be kind and merciful.”^{vii} This further enhances the importance of a benevolent person, as he behaves like G-d.

G-d finds, even among mortals, a glory and pride, as the Prophet Isaiah said, quoting G-d, “Israel, with whom I am glorified.”^{viii} If G-d feels elevated by His association with people, surely we should feel uplifted by doing the same.

People have a Purpose

Why did G-d create us? What does He desire from us? And, what is our importance?

The Prophet Isaiah explained thusly, “So said G-d, ‘the heaven is My Throne and the earth My footstool. What house will you build for Me? Where is the place for Me to repose My Presence? My hand has wrought all of this and all of these came to be,’ says G-d. ‘And to this I look, to a poor and broken-hearted person who trembles at My word.’”^{ix}

A person is far more than the clay from which he was formed. Clay represents the challenge of the mundane and dark aspects of this world. Through struggle, by battling his “clay” essence, a person ascends toward G-d. A person in the Future World basks for eternity in the Presence of G-d, who derives great pleasure from people. A human is valuable, not because he excels or controls anything, but rather because he emulates a benevolent G-d who loves people.

Ideally, we transform our “clay” into “light” and bring G-d into the world. Rabbi Eliyohu of Vilna said that our task in life is not to rise to heaven, but to bring G-d into our dimension, to bring heaven to earth. This is the function of the Temples and Tabernacles so central to Judaism. “And you shall make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among you.”^x

The Temples and Tabernacles, housing the Divine Presence among mortals, also demonstrate the importance of people. There are several interpretations associated with the meaning of the Tabernacles and Temples; all of them attest to the greatness of man. One idea is that G-d wants a dwelling place for His Presence so that people, by entering these holy structures, could experience His Divine Presence and thus draw close to Him. The Torah commands the Jews to come to Jerusalem, to the Temple, on the major festivals, to sense “the Face of G-d.”^{xi}

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The Medrash teaches another idea about the Tabernacle/Temple, that G-d told the Jews, “The Torah is My daughter. I cannot be separated from her. Build Me a place where I may be near her.”^{xii} The Jews, the people of the Torah, are so special to G-d because they study His Torah. He thus honors them with His Presence at the Temple.

What specifically are the qualities of the human being that G-d so prizes? One is our ability to become a vessel capable of receiving holiness and the Divine Presence, the *Shechinah*. Another is the ability to create light from darkness, to transform clay into holiness. These two qualities are, respectively, the female, or *Shechinah* level (manifest when living amid holiness) and the male level (manifest when living in the secular or material world – a place bereft of light, where struggle brings “light from darkness”). Home and family are holy dimensions and the street or marketplace is not. Although Creation was designed for the male essence, “light from darkness,” the male cannot achieve this without help from his wife; she is “a helpmate opposite him,” providing him access to the sanctity of the *Shechinah* and of the home and, thereby, allowing him to succeed in the public sphere, to light up the darkness. Ultimately, male and female share in both the *Shechinah* dimension and the light from darkness, because the two are really “one.”

The Zohar tells us that the Matriarchs’ homes were “temples.” A temple is a sacred place where the Divine Presence rests in this world undisturbed. In the Matriarchs’ homes, there were material manifestations of this Presence, such as a cloud. In other homes, the Presence remained hidden, felt perhaps by those who entered, but not seen with the physical eye.

Note that the Divine Presence rested in the tent of each Matriarch, not in the tents of the Patriarchs. Apparently, these righteous women merited a closeness to G-d that their husbands could not access. As long as a Matriarch lived, a miracle fire burned in her home and the Divine Presence rested there.^{xiii} After she died and until the succeeding Matriarch arrived, the *Shechinah* departed, despite the presence of the Patriarchs. We learn from this that the spiritual level of a pious Jewish woman has the power to make her home like a temple.

Among the nations influenced by Greek ideas, women are not important. Power is. In these societies, the persons accorded the

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greatest honor are conquerors. Judaism, in contrast, prizes holiness and the woman.

Indeed the Talmud and Zohar teach that a man accesses the Holy Presence through his wife.^{xiv} Intimacy brings a unity and sanctity so elevated that it is the process by which a holy soul comes into the world. The Torah directs us: "You shall be holy."^{xv} The Zohar explains that this command refers to marital intimacy, when a husband allows his wife to rejoice and create holiness.^{xvi} The fact that G-d's Presence can rest among mortals in the home of a righteous woman or during the intimate relations between man and wife is strong evidence of the glory and importance of humankind.

The Zohar emphasizes that holiness comes to a marriage because of the unity, the oneness that can be achieved by two people. The same idea explains the glory of the Temple, when individuals came together, united in heart and soul, to serve G-d. The Medrash says that G-d wanted to give the Torah to the Jews as soon as they left Egypt. However, the Israelites quarreled until they came to Sinai. There the people united and became one. G-d said, "My Torah is peace. I will give it to a united and peaceful people."^{xvii} People united merit a special holiness.

G-d wants every person's home to be a temple. Every family can achieve this. Then, there is the collective Temple in Jerusalem that serves all of mankind and is a glory for all of Israel. However even when we don't have a Temple, we still merit G-d's attention, wherever we are, especially in our homes and the Holy Land. Indeed, on some level, each person merits to feel G-d during prayer, during Torah study, or even while living properly in the mundane world. Living properly in the mundane world, that is, engaging in everyday pursuits in an elevated way is called *derech eretz*, a level that "comes before Torah."^{xviii} If we feel important as individuals, we will understand more and more why people and Creation merit G-d's attention.

Although the revealed Divine Presence rested only in certain ages and localities, such as the Sinai Desert in the time of Moses and during the period of the Temple built by Solomon, each person is an abode of holiness in a quiet, personal, but very real way. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin taught that a person himself has the capacity to be a domain of holiness, a temple. A person is so powerful that the lights of holiness in heaven blaze or dim

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according to human deeds.^{xix} The Temples of heaven and earth thus await the deeds of mortals. A person is important!

G-d demanded that the Jewish people build him a temple, a sanctuary or a house for His Presence. Why? The Holy Temple in Jerusalem existed so that people would have a place where they could approach G-d. G-d's House is an expression of His love for people.

Isaiah taught, "My House will be called a House of Prayer for all nations."^{xx} G-d awaits the prayers and good deeds of all people, from all stations and situations.

Can we understand this? Why does G-d focus on people? Why does He want their prayers? Why does He rejoice in their words and deeds? This great mystery is a central theme of Creation.

Why did G-d bring humankind into the world through the creation of only one human being unlike other creatures that were created in droves? So that every person can say, "The world was created for me."^{xxi} G-d did not choose the collective human race as such. He chose the individual, a singular person, as the purpose of Creation and the object of Divine love.

G-d created Adam and then Eve. They sinned in the Garden of Eden and G-d exiled them to a world of pain and punishment. Does G-d still love people who sin? The story in the Book of Genesis describes how G-d struggled with the constant sin and decline of people and yet remained steadfast.

See Genesis on how G-d agonized over mankind's waywardness until He brought the Flood and destroyed mankind, while designating Noah's family to survive.^{xxii}

In the first ten generations of human history, we note that only here and there did good people emerge. Noah was pious, as was his son and successor, Shem. After twenty generations, Abraham founded the Jewish people and G-d made a covenant with him.

When the Jews strayed from their mission, G-d did not despair of sinners. He sent prophets to rebuke Israel and tell them of His love, despite all. Jeremiah told Israel, that G-d said, "I did not speak or command your forefathers regarding a burnt offering or sacrifice on the day I took them from the land of Egypt. I commanded them only saying, 'Hearken to My voice and I will be for you a G-d and you will be for Me a people. And you will go in all of the paths that I will command you *in order that it benefits you*

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(emphasis added).”^{xxiii} From this we learn that G-d’s Law was created to benefit people, in this world, as well as the next world.

We know also that G-d has no need of our good deeds. They are for our good. When people sin and are hurled to the ends of the earth, G-d still loves them. He tells them of the future reconciliation. “G-d referred to you (Israel) as a woman spurned and sad in spirit and as a wife of one’s youth who becomes despised, said your G-d. ‘I left you for a small moment and with great mercy, I will gather you back. With a small anger, I hid My face from you for a moment and with eternal kindness, I will shower mercy upon you,’ said your redeemer, G-d.”^{xxiv}

Israel is the Chosen People and G-d selected them to influence the world and to bring mankind, all of mankind, to G-d. The Talmud says, “Israel was exiled to influence the nations spiritually.”^{xxv} Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzatto writes, “Israel cannot reach its true potential until all people worship G-d.”^{xxvi} Also, “in the Future, the gentiles will achieve a spiritual level even higher than what the Jews have today.”

The Talmud tells us that “in the future, the nations will convert and become part of Israel.”^{xxvii} People will worship G-d and enjoy the Divine bliss of His presence and love. Amalek and other such nations of Israel haters will pass from the world.^{xxviii}

Israel, the Chosen People, chosen for struggle and exile and illumination, has a special closeness to G-d in this and the Future World. “The mountains will budge and the hills will move and yet My kindness will not depart from you and the covenant of My peace will not depart,’ said G-d who will have mercy upon you.”^{xxix}

Why did G-d create people and the world that contains them? The Yeshiva of Elijah the Prophet taught that “G-d created the world wealthy and satisfied with His portion, His wisdom and understanding. (G-d actually had no physical need for the world.) He prepared it and afterwards, He created Adam. He expelled him, calculated to the end of his generations and saw that his generations would sin. G-d said, ‘The world cannot exist if I punish him for his early sins. I must therefore remove the early sins.’ And so He did.”^{xxx}

G-d had no physical need for people; He realized they would sin and defy His Law. And yet, so great was G-d’s need to create people for His own Will that He decided to forgive people their early

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sins and keep giving them opportunities to start over. Knowing this, can we imagine just how important we are to G-d?

Ultimately, G-d will forgive us and build a relationship with us without either pain or punishment. This will happen in the Future, in the Messianic Era and beyond. The Rabbis taught, “Today, [this world] to perform them [the commandments]; tomorrow [the Future World] to receive the reward for doing them.”^{xxxix} Indeed, our future reward is influenced by the pain we had in this world. “According to the pain [in this world as we struggled] is the reward [in the Future World].”^{xxxix}

The Torah, or Bible, begins G-d’s teachings to people with the Creation story. First, we learn who G-d is: the One who created the universe, the sun, moon, etc. Second, we learn, through the creation of Adam in Paradise, that people are to have a close relationship with G-d and that they are central to Creation. Third, we are told that G-d gave Adam a Law for all people, which eventually became the Torah of the Jewish people. From G-d’s instructions to Adam in Genesis, scholars of the Talmud infer the Seven Noahide Laws.^{xxxix} A book of Kabbala is ascribed to Adam, as well. Obviously all people are worthy of G-d’s love.

Of course, the Bible tells us how Adam and Eve sinned, leading G-d to drive them from Paradise. “Man was born to toil (sin).”^{xxxix} Rashi explains that man, unlike angels, have an evil inclination. Therefore, “it is impossible *not* to sin.”

Similarly, Solomon taught in Ecclesiastes that “there is no righteous person in the world who does only good and no sin.”^{xxxix} The plain meaning of the passage is, as Rashi taught, that no person is perfect. The Torah emphasizes this idea, focusing repeatedly on the many stories in the Torah of pious people who erred and failed. However, the Talmud brings an opinion that “four people died, not for their sin, but because of the sin of Adam.”^{xxxix} Thus, they were otherwise perfect. The Talmud commentary Tosfote is bothered by this. How could sinless people have existed if we know that, “there is no righteous person who does only good and no sin.” He then offers an explanation. The Torah must mean that, in general, people sin, but some do not.

Furthermore, we learn from the Talmud that G-d made some pious people sin so the rest of us would follow their example in penitence and thereby rise to a level higher than piety, in the dimension of Penitence.^{xxxix} The Talmud also teaches that “In the

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place where the penitent stands, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.”^{xxxviii}

The purpose of life is to strive and thus achieve purpose. In this world or the next, we will find G-d and Paradise. The Bible tells us about G-d punishing sinners and awaiting their return. G-d promises that eventually, in the End of Days, He will mollify Israel for its terrible suffering in this world. “Let the nations shout praises for His people, when G-d avenges the blood of His servants. And He will place vengeance upon those who tormented them and appease His Land and people.”^{xxxix} Rashi explains: in the Future, the nations will praise Israel for its patience, suffering and trust in a good G-d. G-d will appease His Land and people for the suffering brought on by their own bad choices and inflicted on them by their enemies.

Maimonides writes that in the Future, Jews will repent and achieve Redemption.^{xl} The great phenomena known today as the *Baal Teshuva* movement (the time of Jewish return to the Torah) encourages us to await the time when all of Israel will repent of its errors and bring the Redemption.

People in the “Image of G-d”

“And G-d said, ‘Let us make man in our image and in our form and they will rule over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heaven and the animals and over the entire world and over all creeping things that creep upon the earth.’”^{xli}

Note that G-d created Adam in “our image and in our form.” To whom was G-d referring when He said “our image”? One interpretation is that G-d was simply speaking here in the way that any king speaks of himself – in the plural, commonly known as the “royal we.” This manner of speaking has two effects: it distinguishes the king from commoners and indicates his role in relation to them. Also, the king can speak in the name of his people, those who submit to him, because he represents them.

Another explanation of this plural language is that G-d is referring here to the angels who existed before Adam.

Thus, we can understand “in our image” to mean either in the image of G-d, or in the image of G-d together with the angels. Either way, this passage teaches us that a human being must be a high-level creature, being that he is made in “our” image. Still we

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must ask how it is possible for a finite, mortal person be in the image of G-d who has no finite form.

The creation of man was different from that of the animals and all other earthly, physical forms. Adam was made of clay, yet received a Divine soul breathed into him by G-d Himself. G-d formed Adam of heavenly essence, closer to the angels and other heavenly creatures than the animals. Indeed, Adam was to rule over the lower world, because he was superior to it. Man may have been made to eat, sleep and function like the animals, but he was given a heavenly soul.

Furthermore, what does G-d mean when describing Adam as “in our image and form”? If G-d and angels have no corporal bodies, what image or form could Adam possibly share with them?

To answer this, we return to the very beginning of the Creation story. In creating the world, G-d had to block His own light and form darkness, more accurately described as the force of challenge designed to test people. G-d intends that we encounter this darkness in order to *reveal* Him. As we struggle, a Divine light, once hidden, returns to the world.

Human beings revel in and radiate this light. Thus all of us exude Divine “image and form.” People are “similar” to G-d, because they reveal G-d.

We are also like G-d in that we can do things that He does. G-d created the world and brought light into it and so do we. G-d created the world and established the standard of justice and mercy and so do we. In this way, we can attain G-d’s “image and form,” developing ever greater likeness to Him. The Zohar expands on this concept. “G-d said to man, ‘Note that I built all of the city (the universe) and everything in it. Just as I ruled over it and built it up as My heart desired, so shall you build and perform the work of the world. From now on, everything is given over to you.’ Thus are people in the image of G-d.”^{xlii}

What an incredible idea. Have we really been designated to take over for G-d in sustaining the world? Do we really stand in His stead? Can we internalize such a concept?

Each of us is both a builder and a building in G-d’s world. One structure we must build is our own person. We then have families to build, children and grandchildren. Some parents build beautiful buildings and some do not. Because we build in G-d’s world, we are judged by a high standard. Are we not terrified?

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What of the public “buildings”? Who will build them? Who will care for all of the neglected children, the disenfranchised and the helpless elderly? And, if we succeed in our construction, what then? Do we become arrogant?

My mentor, Reb Shmuel Toledano, taught that we work hard to reveal G-d and maintain goodness for six days of the week. We sense that our thoughts, words and deeds accomplish much. On the Sabbath, however, we recognize that, although it seems to us that we achieved with our own efforts, G-d is suffused in all that we do. By way of His kindness, we are able to do and, thereby, feel a sense of accomplishment. We should then recognize that the crown of our struggle and achievement is also a Divine kindness. All of our thoughts, words and deeds are ultimately rooted in the Divine Will.

Understanding our free will and control over the universe in the light of G-d’s Hidden Hand is surely not easy; it may even be overwhelming. There are certain questions we don’t expect to answer in this world, but we know that there are answers.

People and Angels

In the Garden of Eden, Adam was higher than the angels and closer to G-d. The Medrash says that the angels tried to sing praises to Adam’s holiness, but that G-d stopped them.^{xliii} People are suffused with a Divine soul, but we are far from Divine! Therefore, the angels are allowed to sing praises only to G-d. Another medrash says, “The pious are greater than the angels.”^{xliv} We understand from this that humankind, even after the sin, even after leaving the Garden and entering a world of curses and pain, was still on a higher spiritual level than the angels. Angels are not the purpose of Creation. People are.

And yet, the angels exist in a dimension of light and people do not. How do we explain this? To answer the question, we must understand what “image” and “form” mean.

“Image” in Hebrew is *tzelem*. *Tzelem* is an image, or a copy of another thing. *Tzelem*’s root is *tsel*, or “shadow.” A shadow connotes two things: it represents blocked light, or darkness, and it represents a likeness of the body that blocks the light.

A person as a *tzelem* of G-d is the darkness or shadow created by G-d when He hides His Presence. People struggle to

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recreate this light and to reveal G-d, who hides Himself. And just as all shadows in some way evoke or represent the light-blocking body, so a *tzelem* of G-d evokes G-d's hidden Presence.

The light revealed by human effort is higher than was the original light that G-d blocked. Indeed, the first light of Creation was developed out of darkness.^{xlv} This primal light was fueled by the Will of Heaven to reveal light from darkness. The Zohar explains that the extraordinary spiritual level achieved by Abraham was "light from darkness," as he was the issue of a pagan. It concludes, "Good children from wicked parents are superior to good children from good parents, just as light from darkness and wisdom from folly are superior [to light from light and wisdom from wisdom]."^{xlvi}

Angels are "light from light" as they have no darkness and no great challenges. People are the product of challenge and darkness and their light is so powerful that angels are far from matching them.

Human suffering raises us above the angels. "Behold, the *Eralim* angels cry outside."^{xlvii} In heaven, there are inner and outer sanctums. People earn a place inside in the merit of their struggles in this world. The angels, who do not struggle with evil, are "outside" of the heavenly inner sanctum. For this, "the *Eralim* angels cry outside."

In a similar vein, another medrash interprets this passage to mean that the angels lament because, unlike people, they are not essential to G-d's plan for the world. They cry, "If there is no Israel, who needs us?"^{xlviii} Angels recognize that they are not "inside," not central to Creation.

Although angels, creatures of heaven, see farther, go quicker and think better than human beings in finite bodies, they have no challenges. However, "man was born to toil."^{xlix} Without toil, the angels are relegated to the "outside," to a role that can never be central to G-d's plan.

Man in the Demuse Form of G-d

The Torah teaches us that man is in the form (in Hebrew, *demuse*) of G-d. What does this mean? What is "form"?

Demuse comes from the word "*domeh*," or "similar." The word is also close to another word, "*dome*" or "silence." Why are human

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beings similar (*domeh*) to G-d and angels? One answer is that we merit this resemblance by accepting our difficulties and problems with silence, with *dome* rather than with bitter complaints.

We find that Aaron lost two sons. “And Aaron was silent (*dome*).”ⁱ Silence is the acceptance of G-d’s Will, even when we don’t understand it. This silence propels people to a “silent zone,” a dimension above mortal cognizance. By this level of acceptance, we merit transcendence. Aaron’s silence allowed him to become the High Priest and enter the Holy of Holies close to the revealed Divine Presence.

One opinion in the Talmud is that even Moses did not properly understand human suffering. A mortal cannot understand it. Just as G-d is hidden from us, so His ways are hidden from us. After death, the soul will see G-d and He will answer all questions. The “shadow” or “silence” challenge offers people an opportunity to pierce the veil of the finite.

Shadows, dark and menacing, conceal great goodness. Ultimately human silence, acceptance of G-d’s Will and struggle reveal light in the shadows. From the blackness of the abyss will come forth people, blazing with a light that humbles the very angels.

We merit to be in Divine *demuse* by imitating G-d’s deeds. “Just as G-d is kind and merciful, so we must be kind and merciful.”ⁱⁱ The Talmud says, “Just as G-d buries the dead (Moses), so you bury the dead. Just as G-d visits the sick (Abraham), so you visit the sick.”ⁱⁱⁱ We take on the “form” of G-d by doing what He does. We become the “image” of G-d by revealing His Presence in the place of darkness and challenge where G-d hid His light.

“Let us Make Man”

G-d said, “Let *us* make man.”ⁱⁱⁱⁱ (emphasis added.) The word “us” refers to angels, according to Rashi. Yet, one could conclude from this sentence that “us” implies multiple deities. Therefore, the Torah quickly adds the next passage, “And G-d created the man.” G-d alone created man. So why did G-d say, “Let *us* make man”? Why not say, “I will make man.” Even if “us” does refer to angels, the angels did not participate in the Creation. So why say use the plural here?

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Rashi says, “This is the humility of G-d.” By honoring the angels, G-d acted modestly. He did not take all of the glory for Creation. Rashi adds that G-d said this to the angels, “Let us make man,” so that they would not be jealous of Adam.

However, the implications of this story, G-d’s creating man, are not just for the benefit of the angels. G-d shows us, by His example, to be humble and seems also to teach us about jealousy and its origins. Humility and helping others, not hurting and dominating them, are the keys to individual and family survival. We survive in family only when the father/husband leads with kindness and not by control or coercion. Only when parents and spouses think first of the other can a marriage and family endure. Conceit kills family, friendship and even one’s relationship with G-d. Regarding the conceited person, G-d says, “He and I cannot dwell together.”^{liv}

Rashi’s two readings of “Let us make man” – (1) to demonstrate humility and (2) to prevent envy among angels – seem to be two disparate interpretations of this phrase. In fact, they may be aspects of one interpretation.

Perhaps because G-d acted humbly and honored angels, the angels learned to be humble and honored man. Thus, in both of his explanations, Rashi contends that G-d spoke in plural language for a single purpose: to protect people from the envy of angels. According to Rashi, “Let us make man” suggests that G-d warded off envy through personal example, acting humbly by honoring the angels, or that He honored the angels by including them in the process of making man. If the angels helped in man’s creation, as G-d commanded them, they would not be envious, in the same way that a father does not envy his child.

With His words to the angels, G-d teaches us how to raise a family. Every new child that comes along puts a strain on the original family. There is only so much attention available and each new person demands a portion of it. Tension is inevitable. What is the solution?

First, we must imitate G-d’s ways. G-d, Father of us all, understood when creating angels and people that they were likely to feel competitive and jealous of each other. He averted this problem by modeling humility. To prevent rivalry among members of a family, the father of that family should imitate G-d and be humble. If he acts only humbly and with kindness, why should his

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wife or children become arrogant or seek glory? Second, it is a good idea for parents to involve their existing children with the arrival and integration of each new baby into their family. This will allow the big kids to feel a little bit like parents themselves and is less likely to provoke them to fight for ever more divided attention.

There is a Jewish community in America noted for its harmony among community members. The senior rabbi of the community was a completely self-effacing individual. When people saw that this man, a genius, had not even a trace of arrogance, they were ashamed to be arrogant themselves. This led to a wonderful, collective calm where envy did not even raise its head.

G-d created man with superior potential. Even angels cannot reach the levels attainable by a human being. Angels do not have the Torah. Therefore, angels might easily envy people. This would have greatly disrupted G-d's Will for Creation. To prevent this, G-d demonstrated that He, the Creator, honors those far beneath him, the angels. The angels then learned to honor man rather than trying to assert themselves over him. As we know, G-d also involved the angels in the process of creating man so that they would feel a connection to Adam as their handiwork, in part, and would not hate him.

How could angels, who have no free will, hate? Before exploring that question it is important to know that there are two kinds of hate: a hate rooted in envy and evil and a hate rooted in idealism. Angels, as spiritual beings, can hate sinners. When they see people sinning, they may hate people. We find, indeed, that some angels never accepted people until G-d flung them from heaven into the world. Once there, the angels tasted the Evil Inclination that people have to contend with and became great sinners themselves.

Actually, what difference does it make to us if the angels are jealous? Why was it so important that the Torah teach this lesson about G-d's humility – given that the phrase “Let us...” can easily be misread in a way that could lead to heresy?

It must be that the concept of humility is fundamental to the Creation story. Why? Furthermore, could this phrase “Let us make man” really lead a person to paganism? Is this possible? Do we really need to be reassured to know that G-d, and not multiple deities, created man?

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Actually, when we think into it, we realize that “Let us” does not, in anyway, connote a challenge to monotheism. In fact, it refutes paganism completely!

One who turns from knowledge of and belief in G-d to paganism does so out of the misguided belief that people are unworthy of relating to G-d directly. In order to challenge this idea and allow people to approach Him, G-d said, “Let us.” He did this to include the angels in the act of Creation and to teach humility to us. His humility invites people to relate to Him. Paganism and the faith in spiritual intermediaries are belief systems that design a way to approach a G-d who supposedly refuses mere mortals. Thus, “Let us” is a direct repudiation of paganism.

We learn something else from this humble phrase. The world was created so that people leave the heavens, where their souls are comfortable and come to earth where their souls are not comfortable. In a lifetime of struggle and even sin, people work to merit a portion in Paradise, as a reward for their good deeds. Thus, the purpose of Creation is for people to achieve self-actualization. In heaven, without struggle, souls eat at the Table of the King without being deserving. This is called “eating the bread of shame.” Earning our way is the purpose of life, the reason the world was created.

Alone, cast into a dark world, the human being claws away at the veil hiding holiness. A person who merits to reveal holiness is truly great in G-d’s eyes. G-d, in His humility, allowed people to come into the world and achieve greatness, pride in themselves and the ultimate glory of Paradise. Indeed, the purpose of Creation is that people reveal holiness and be partners with G-d. For this they merit to sit with G-d for all eternity, basking in glory and infinite pleasure.

If so, the world was created so that we have the opportunity to struggle to form the self. It means that G-d sacrifices His glory, profaning His Name, in a world where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer for one reason alone: to give people the chance to develop an essential and primal pride in themselves. When we come to heaven after a lifetime in this world, we want one thing, to be proud of ourselves. We want to come loaded with good deeds. We want to be recognized for our struggles. Appropriate pride in our own development is the purpose of Creation.

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Therefore, pride and self-actualization are central to Creation. Because this is true, however, it is all too easy for people to make a fundamental mistake, seeking honor and acting pridefully in this world before the proper time for this, in the Future World. Indeed, Creation could easily become a raging inferno of ego and jealousy if people make this mistake. Ego and jealousy in this world destroy Creation. They deny us our portion in the Future World. Ego and jealousy are evil. So how could G-d create a world whose purpose is to nurture ego and pride?

The secret of Creation is that we achieve eternal pride only by denying it in this world. In fact, the greatest saint, Moses, was known for his modesty.

Also, our egos are an enormous test. Jealousy is a towering challenge. In order to allow people a chance, G-d created man with His humility. Thus, the impossible happened. Man, created only for his own glory and reward in Paradise, achieves this with humility.

Can it really be that our fairest goal, pride in ourselves, comes from humility and deference to others? Yes.

We must work every day, every spare moment to appreciate what Divine humility means. G-d watches us every second and notices all of our thoughts, words and deeds. When we fail, G-d suffers. When we succeed, G-d rejoices. Is there enough ego in us to accept this? There will never be enough. Indeed, when our cup spills over with appreciation for G-d's love for us and His humility in relation to us, we are prepared to love others and be humble in the presence of all people.

People at the Center of Creation

In order to create a world of challenge, G-d declared a zone inside His Holiness whereby evil actualized. Where was this zone?

The zone of challenge and darkness appeared in the "center" of G-d's Essence. As G-d has no corporeal form, "center" is an allegorical term meaning the highest importance. G-d hid His Presence in a certain dimension of His Essence and made there Creation. Darkness gradually appeared and finally evil actualized. All of this took place in the very "center" of G-d.^{lv}

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The symbolic meaning here is that challenges and conflict we encounter in life occur only because of G-d's Will. Moreover, the dimension of suffering and sin is central to G-d's Will. After all, it appeared in the "center" of G-d.

We want to love others and ourselves. How do we do this? We can only do this if we feel that a human being is worthy, valuable and special. Of course, we can love a dog or even a sunset, in some way, but the love for another human being or for ourselves requires that we value humanity as a whole. Lurian Kabbala tells us just how close people are to G-d, how salient to Divinity is the human soul and its struggles.^{lvi}

Maimonides teaches that "in the days of Enosh [a man who lived during the third generation of Creation], people committed a great error ... they said, 'since G-d created the stars and spheres to guide the world and placed them on high and gave them honor and they are servants who serve before Him, it is proper to honor them.'"^{lvii} They then began to worship the stars themselves. Eventually, false prophets taught people to worship graven images. People claimed that stars spoke to them and demanded worship. Full-blown paganism now gripped the world.^{lviii}

What went wrong? Why did people in the generation of Enosh, only two generations after Creation, turn away from a direct worship of G-d to the worship of stars and, eventually, images? The answer is that when people despair of the many failures of humans, they turn away from G-d. Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Their child, Cain, killed his brother Abel. The third generation no longer felt secure that G-d could love them in their now imperfect state; they felt distanced from Him. People then sought intermediaries. Instead of realizing that the stars and angels are subordinate to people, who are the purpose of Creation, they despaired and felt inferior to these entities. This led them to reject a close relationship with G-d and to pray only to angels and stars.

The modern world is selfish. Evolution, the theory that the species is preserved by the strong destroying the weak, negates the value of the individual. In this scenario, people cannot love other people as themselves. They must wipe out the competition and get ahead. That does not make for loving marriages or families.

Indeed, many people do step over others to get where they are going. Ultimately, alone, without a successful marriage or a

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supportive family, these “winners” realize how futile their victories really are.

The Torah Reveals People

The Sages taught that “*derech erez*, (the way of the world, or humaneness) precedes the Torah.” There are two ways to understand this assertion. One is that one cannot approach Torah without *derech erez*. Another is that *derech erez* is, in some way, higher than Torah.

Both connotations are consistent with Kabbalistic teachings. The first approach, a Lurian concept, teaches us that a person must attain a high level of sensitivity and thoughtfulness in order to become a proper human being. We call this becoming a mensch, an elevated person. Only a person developed in such a manner can begin to approach Torah learning. In this sense, *derech erez* is a prerequisite to learning Torah.

There is, however, a level of civility that is higher than intellectual learning. The Talmud says two things related to this. One is that the Fear of G-d is greater than learning Torah.^{lix} Two is that working and earning a living with toil is higher than the Fear of G-d.^{lx} Thus, working and humane conduct are higher than the Fear of G-d and certainly higher than Torah learning or intellectual acquisition alone.^{lxi} This does not mean that a wicked worker is better than a Torah scholar. It means that achieving *derech erez* is a central task, beyond intellectual learning and even fear of heaven. That is, the true learning of Torah and true Fear of G-d can only come to a person blessed with humane behavior. A person acquires this by acting humanely in all arenas of life, including with family and at work. One who lives without family or work and isolates himself to find holiness may fail.

Thus the Zohar equates marital relations with the highest holiness. *Derech erez* means bringing holiness into the mundane aspects of life, especially in our dealings with family and society. Why is this level higher than learning Torah intellectually?

There are levels of the mind, external and internal. We can learn Torah intellectually with the external mind. *Derech erez*, however, involves the primal reality of the person, the innate and inner mind and essence. This, in a way, is more powerful than the external mind.

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Thus, the wicked can become great Torah scholars, as we find with Doeg and Achitofel, the chiefs of the Rabbinical Court in the time of Saul and David, the Jewish kings. However, one whose inner essence is pure with *derech erez* is completely pure.

Let us not denigrate this world. The Vilna Gaon taught that although Paradise awaits the pious in the Future World, the primary concern of life is to bring G-d into *this* world. The Temple is an example of this. *Derech erez* is the person, at his most innate and primal level, suffused with holiness. This is the true person and this is the true Torah.

There is another explanation as to why *derech erez* is so important, higher than Fear of G-d or Torah; however the explanation is subtle and is drawn from deep Kabbalistic teachings. The *Shechinah*, or Divine Presence, is not remote from us. It is with us, in this world, even amid our suffering and impurity. When we lack something and thus suffer, we have pain, of course, but the *Shechinah* has deeper pain. When we pray for relief, the *Shechinah* will benefit from this relief as well. Pious people would, therefore, pray for their needs, for relief with the understanding that this would not only benefit them, but the *Shechinah*, as well. Relieving the pain of the *Shechinah* became, for them, the primary motivation of their prayers. At some level, such people associate their material needs with the pleasure of heaven so that their *derech erez*, the quality of their worldly ways, become an offering to promote the peace of the *Shechinah*.

This idea is behind many Kabbalistic and Hassidic teachings. At a wedding between two of the greatest Hassidic rabbinic families, one rebbe uttered a blessing for “material and spiritual matters,” which caused the other to question him. “Materialism before spirituality?” he asked. “Yes,” said the other “because the materialism of *derech erez* is an elevated spirituality.”^{lxii} Does this mean we should leave the study hall and become farmers?

From teachings embedded in the Torah given by G-d to Moses at Sinai, we know that G-d desires three things from people. They are (1) observance of the basic commands, (2) regular study of Torah and (3) *derech erez*, or ethical behavior. Each level is higher than the preceding one.

Observing the basic commands directs us to do what we must do and to refrain from doing what we must not do. Higher than this is the study of Torah.^{lxiii} When we study Torah, we begin to attach

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ourselves to our soul and to infinity. We rise higher and higher as we study the Divine Law. In each letter of the Torah, myriads of sacred dimensions sparkle.

Higher still is attaining *derech erez*. Now holiness, once separate from us, enters the mundane and sanctifies our material essence. In fact, our material essence is shown to be the primary vessel of holiness, revealing what fulfilling the commands and learning Torah could not reveal. *Derech erez* reveals in the human being an image of G-d

Let us take the example of two farmers. One prays and studies Torah. Holiness suffuses his essence. He farms with this Torah consciousness and thereby unites heaven and earth. Another farmer has no Torah learning. His farming is just about turning clods of soil. Of course, there is a value in turning the soil. However, the ultimate level of farming is as the act of one united with heaven through keeping G-d's commands and learning Torah. The higher the spiritual level we reach, the more we can access spiritual domains and the more we can obtain hidden holiness from the mundane.

However, we cannot skip steps. Although we value *derech erez* so highly, we must perfect ourselves first with commands and Torah. They must be the focus of our life. Only when we have achieved a level of mastery in the performance of commands and the learning of Torah can our *derech erez* be truly actualized.

Lurian Kabbala teaches that Torah can only be given to a person of character, a mensch. One lacking in proper character traits cannot obtain Torah and cannot bask in G-d's Presence through learning it. One who is conceited, for instance, can study all day long. However G-d says, as we mentioned, "He and I cannot exist in the same dimension."^{lxiv}

Thus *derech erez*, the way of the world, allows a person to be truly human. This level of being human is a prerequisite for performing the commands and learning Torah fully, as mentioned earlier. *Derech erez* is also the culmination of the commands and learning Torah. Thus we begin our service of G-d by behaving with basic humanity and reach the height of this service when holiness suffuses our human sensitivities.

Therefore, when we perform the lower levels of commands and Torah learning, we should do so with the intent of preparing ourselves for the higher level of *derech erez*. When we feel human,

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we perform commands and study Torah in a different way. Thus ideally, all three levels, the commands, learning Torah and *derech erez*, are with us always and are united whenever we accomplish any one of the three levels of piety.

Just as a person has a heart, head and body and cannot exist without all three perfectly synchronized, so a Jew must have commands, Torah and *derech erez*, and they must function in unison, without competition of any kind.

We therefore expend major efforts on commands and then on Torah learning. We do this because without a strong foundation in commands and Torah learning, we cannot really achieve a level of *derech erez* worthy of its name.

Surely purity is required to achieve every one of these three levels. Commands, in and of themselves, require a purity befitting Divine service. If one steals money and uses it to perform a good deed with it, G-d says, “I hate an offering purchased with stolen money.”^{lxv}

Nonetheless, we may begin with basic commands and easily find in their performance a basic purity. Everyone can begin serving G-d by refraining from stealing, for instance. Studying Torah with proper motivation is much harder. Proper *derech erez* is even more remote from the Torah beginner. So, one can proceed in stages: First, work toward purity in doing commands, and then find purity in Torah study. Finally, strive to achieve a balanced and integrated *derech erez*.

Fear of Heaven

People are born with an innate, but undeveloped Fear of G-d. After one performs commands and studies Torah, he senses G-d more clearly. Now, his Fear of G-d is much higher. He fears G-d because he senses the Presence. This is altogether a different level.

The passage instructing us about the Fear of G-d in Hebrew is “*raishis chochomo yiras Hashem*.” If we translate the entire passage, except for the first word “*raishis*,” we get: “the *raishis* of wisdom is the Fear of G-d.” What does *raishis* mean? It can mean two things: beginning or choicest.

Thus, the passage can have two translations, depending on how we read *raishis*. The Fear of G-d is either the *beginning* of

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wisdom or it is the choicest, *highest level* of wisdom a person can achieve. The two translations are poles apart. If we read the passage one way, Fear of G-d is said to be the beginning or first level of wisdom; if we read it the other way, Fear of G-d is said to be the final, or highest level of wisdom.

However both translations are accurate. When the Fear of G-d is on a low level, "The Fear of G-d is *the beginning* [only the beginning] of wisdom." When one is suffused with the holiness of the commands (the learning of Torah and *derech erez*), "the Fear of G-d is *the choicest* Wisdom."

The letters of the word "*yiro*," or fear, are the same letters as the word "*riyo*," or seeing. Ultimately, by bringing the Divine Presence to earth, we sense it; we know it and we "see" it. Our soul sees it and we feel it, because it is so close to us and we to it.

The same holds true for *derech erez*. There is a "beginning" level, and there is a "choice" level. We all begin with the basic human instinct to be decent. However only one elevated by the commands and imbued with Torah can achieve the true heights of *derech erez*, or humane, ethical behavior.

Of course, Jews have a Torah and others have the universal Torah from Sinai. There is, for all people, a beginning level and a latter, consummate level in relation to humanity and the awe of heaven. As we go through life, even if we do not read that many pages of religious text, life instructs us; indeed, it may be the great instructor!

The Talmud uses the word "elder" to describe a true sage. Although you do find some old people who are far from wise, it's hard to move through life without learning many lessons. Thus one who merits long life often has a wisdom that young people do not have.

Rabbi Yochanon stood up in the presence of an elderly pagan to show him respect. Rashi, explaining this, says that an older person sees many miracles in life.^{lxvi} From this we learn that wisdom and a feel for the spiritual is available to all people through simple living.

We are the “Breath of Life” from G-d

Religion is often used as a solution to people’s need for spirituality. Thus the needs of people are the religion’s primary concern. If people did not exist, the religion would not be needed.

Another way of putting this is that people see a need for religion, so they invent a deity. This deity serves the needs of people. People invent it and design it according to their requirements. This deity can never be more powerful than its human inventors. Judaism, or Torah, was not designed to solve people’s spiritual problems. Not only did G-d exist before people, but His Torah also preceded us. Torah is a blueprint of the Divine Plan and an insight into the Divine Will. It is for people to utilize to serve and know G-d. However, people are surely not the prime component in Torah. G-d is.

G-d even fashioned the Torah long before He created Adam and Eve.^{lxvii} G-d did not create the Torah or the Jewish religion to fulfill people’s need for spirituality. He created people to solve *His* need to fulfill the Torah!

In other words, G-d’s need for people is part of His sacred Will. It is thus sacred and beyond infinity. Unlike a person’s need for G-d, which is necessarily limited given that it is contained within a limited being, G-d’s love for people is utterly beyond limitation. However, as we recognize G-d’s Will to love people, we rise toward G-d and are suffused with infinite energy in our finite struggles.

Ultimately, “Israel, the Torah and G-d are bound to each other.”^{lxviii} Israel, although human and finite, enters infinity and transcendence through the Torah to unite with G-d. At this point, what seems to be an unbridgeable chasm between people and G-d becomes bridgeable. The massive conflict between finite people and G-d is resolved, to some degree, when people escape the limits of the finite and enter the Infinite.

According to the Zohar, “G-d studied the letters of the Torah for two thousand years before Creation.”^{lxix} The Zohar says that when the time finally came to create the world, G-d selected the letter “*Beis*” to begin the Torah.

Let us study the Zohar in a close reading of these passages: “*When G-d wanted to create the world, all of the letters were hidden.*” The letters would eventually bring lights into Creation so

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that the world and everything in it would thrive or be diminished in accord with how well people abide by the Divine letters of the Law, the letters of Torah. But at the moment when G-d simply willed a world, He hid the letters from Creation and people. They applied only to G-d. Thus, Torah and Law are higher than Creation or people and relate to G-d. However, G-d's Will requires Creation and people. He wants them connected to the letters of the Torah Law.

The Zohar continues: *"For two thousand years before Creation G-d would gaze at the letters and enjoy them."* No people or creation are involved here. G-d created letters of the Torah that are higher than people or creations. So higher are the divine letters that G-d gazes at them for two thousand years and enjoys them.

G-d "gazed at the letters" to impart to them the capacity to be seen and to be known. Ultimately, this "gazing" would allow letters to be seen by people who study Torah. They would connect with G-d by learning Torah with these letters. G-d "enjoyed" the letters. This imparted to the letters a potential for humans to study Torah and to achieve joy by so doing. This joy is similar to the pleasure of the Future World where the soul connects with G-d, although it is limited in the finite life. The "gazing" and "enjoying" of the letters by G-d prepared the Torah for Creation. These are seminal acts instructing the divine letters to adjust to a finite Creation and humans.

G-d turns the letters toward the Creation. He takes two thousand years, or two major steps, each called a thousand years. One step, or the first thousand years, is a level of infinite transcendence; the next step, or the second thousand years, prepares, in a seminal manner, the finite Creation.

G-d notices the letters; He notices something that is not G-d. That is the first stage of Creation. The second stage is G-d "enjoying" something that is outside Himself, the primal preparation for G-d relishing His relationship with people and their deeds.

At first, the Divine letters reflected G-d, apart from the anticipated Creation. Then, through G-d's "study" of the Torah, a new era began whereby the Divine letters took a form relative to the Creation.

G-d's love for Torah is the love of something very holy. Torah is not just a guide for people, external to G-d's Will and Essence. Torah is an expression of Divine affinity and intent.

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Israel, as the ideal level of humanity, is also not external to G-d's Will. It is a revelation of the Divine Will. G-d created the Torah for Israel, to study it and become close to Him. However, implicit and explicit in this opportunity is the obligation to be "a light unto the nations" and share such light with all good people.^{lxx} The holiest Jewish place is the Temple, which was a "place of prayer for all of the nations."^{lxxi} Israel went into exile "to promote spirituality among the nations."^{lxxii}

Originally, there were no Jews. G-d wanted the entire human race to achieve a very high spiritual level. For this purpose, G-d created Adam. Adam was not Jewish.

G-d breathed into Adam "the breath of life." When G-d breathed into Adam, His breath went into Adam's body. The "breath of G-d" implies something from inside of G-d, or something central and innermost in the Will of G-d. Thus, we can say that the inner Will of G-d entered the innards of Adam and gave him life.^{lxxiii}

All people, everyone a descendent of Adam, may obtain the "breath of life" and unite with G-d in His innermost Will. Ultimately, says the Talmud, all nations will serve G-d. The Divine breath must return to its source, which is the Will of G-d. That is, humanity, created by G-d and imbued with his Will or "breath," has a destination of Divine light. However, in the world of testing, some will succeed and some fail.

We don't understand very much about the primordial, supernal systems of holiness. We are not required to understand them, nor can we really do so. However, we can attain one insight. People are very precious and very high. All of us walk around with a Divine life force inside of us. Whether we succeed in our life's task largely depends upon whether we appreciate just how high and holy we are.

There is no greater challenge than to understand human importance. We are blobs of DNA walking around, failing and succeeding. However, we can do this because of the Will of G-d. He empowered us by His "breath of life." G-d breathed into a clay body. Yes, it was a clay body, made of earth. What, however, was inside it? Why did G-d create a universe just to blow Divine "breath" into earth? Only G-d knows. Our task is not to understand G-d, but to respect ourselves.

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When we respect ourselves, we can then learn to respect others, because we all possess this same “breath of life” and eternal, sacred, and infinite potential.

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- ² B. Sanhedrin 37a.
- ii Psalms 8:4.
- iii Job 7:17.
- iv Ibid., 15:14.
- v B. Berachos 33:2.
- vi Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzatto (the Ramchal), *One Hundred Thirty Eight Gates to Wisdom*, 3, 4.
- vii B. Shabbos, 133b.
- viii Isaiah 49:3.
- ix Ibid. 66:1.
- x Exodus 25:8.
- xi Deut. 16:16.
- xii *Medrash Rabbah* (Exodus) 33.
- xiii Zohar I, Ram edition, 133a.
- xiv B. Yevamos 62b.
- xv Leviticus 19:2.
- xvi Zohar, Kedoshim, 81b; Zohar, Chayei Sarah, 122a.
- xvii *Yalkut Shimoni*, Yisro, 273.
- xviii *Tanna Divei Eliyahu*, 1.
- xix *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:19 (see there “Uma”).
- xx Isa. 56:7.
- xxi B. Sanhedrin 37a.
- xxii Ibid., 6:3-8.
- xxiii Jeremiah 7:22-23 (see *Metzudas Dovid*: “I [G-d] get nothing from this, [it is] only to do good for you”).
- xxiv Isa. 54:7.
- xxv B. Pesachim 87b.
- xxvi Lutzatto, *Maamar HaChochmah, Rosh HaShana Prayer*.
- xxvii B. Berachos 57b.

Secret of the Scale

- xxviii Lutaztto, *Maamar HaChochmah*, 1.
- xxix Isa. 54:10.
- xxx *Tanna Divei Eliyahu*, 1.
- xxxi B. Eruvin 22a.
- xxxii *Pirkei Avos* 5:23.
- xxxiii B. Sanhedrin 56b.
- xxxiv Job 5:7.
- xxxv Ecclesiastes. 7:20.
- xxxvi B. Shabbos 55b.
- xxxvii B. Avodah Zarah 4b.
- xxxviii B. Berachos 34b (see also Zohar II, 106b).
- xxxix Deut. 32:43.
- xl M. Teshuva 7.5.
- xli Gen. 1:26.
- xlii *Zohar Chadash*, Sulam edition, Bereishis, 288, 286.
- xliii *Bereishis Rabbah*, 8.
- xliv *Yalkut Shimoni*, Daniel, 1062.
- xlv Gen. 1:1-2.
- xlvi Zohar II, 12b.
- xlvii Isa. 33:7.
- xlviii *Yalkut Shimoni*, Esther, 1057.
- xlix Job 5:7.
- ¹ Levit. 10:3.
- li B. Shabbos 133b.
- lii B. Sotah 14a.
- liii Gen. 1:26.
- liv B. Sotah 5a.

Chapter One – Appreciate Yourself

^{lv} *Otzros Chaim* of Rabbi Chaim Vital, first lecture.

^{lvi} Rabbi Yitzchok Luria taught Kabbala in Tzefas, Israel, more than 400 years ago.

^{lvii} Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Avodah Zarah*, 1:1

^{lviii} *Ibid.*

^{lix} B. Shabbos 31b.

^{lx} B. Berachos 8a.

^{lxi} Fear higher than Torah is in B. Shabbos 31b. Work higher than fear is in B. Berachos 8a.

^{lxii} See also Lutzatto, *Sefer Otzros Ramchal* on VaYetzei, which resolves opposing views from multiple sources that seem to say that prayer is for the *Shechinah* and not for fulfilling our material needs. This contradicts the Gemara that asserts that prayer is about requesting that our needs be met in this world. The resolution of this contradiction is that a truly pious person prays for material things and, automatically in his deepest self, prays for the welfare of the holy heavenly lights and *Shechinah*.

^{lxiii} See B. Moed Katan 9b: If possible, learn Torah and let others do the commands.

^{lxiv} B. Sotah 5a.

^{lxv} See B. Succah 30a.

^{lxvi} B. Kiddushin 33a.

^{lxvii} *Bereishis Rabbah* 8:2; *Yalkut Shimoni*, Shir HaShirim, 988.

^{lxviii} *Zohar* III, 73a; see *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:16.

^{lxix} *Zohar*, Foreword 2b.

^{lxx} Isa. 49:6. See commentary of Rabbi David Kimchi (Radak) on that verse; “All nations will praise You.” Psalms 64:4.

^{lxxi} “For My House will be called a House of Prayer for all of the nations.” *Ibid.*, 56:7.

^{lxxii} “And many nations and powerful countries will come to seek G-d.” Zechariah 8:22.

^{lxxiii} See also *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:16 (the comment in small letters).