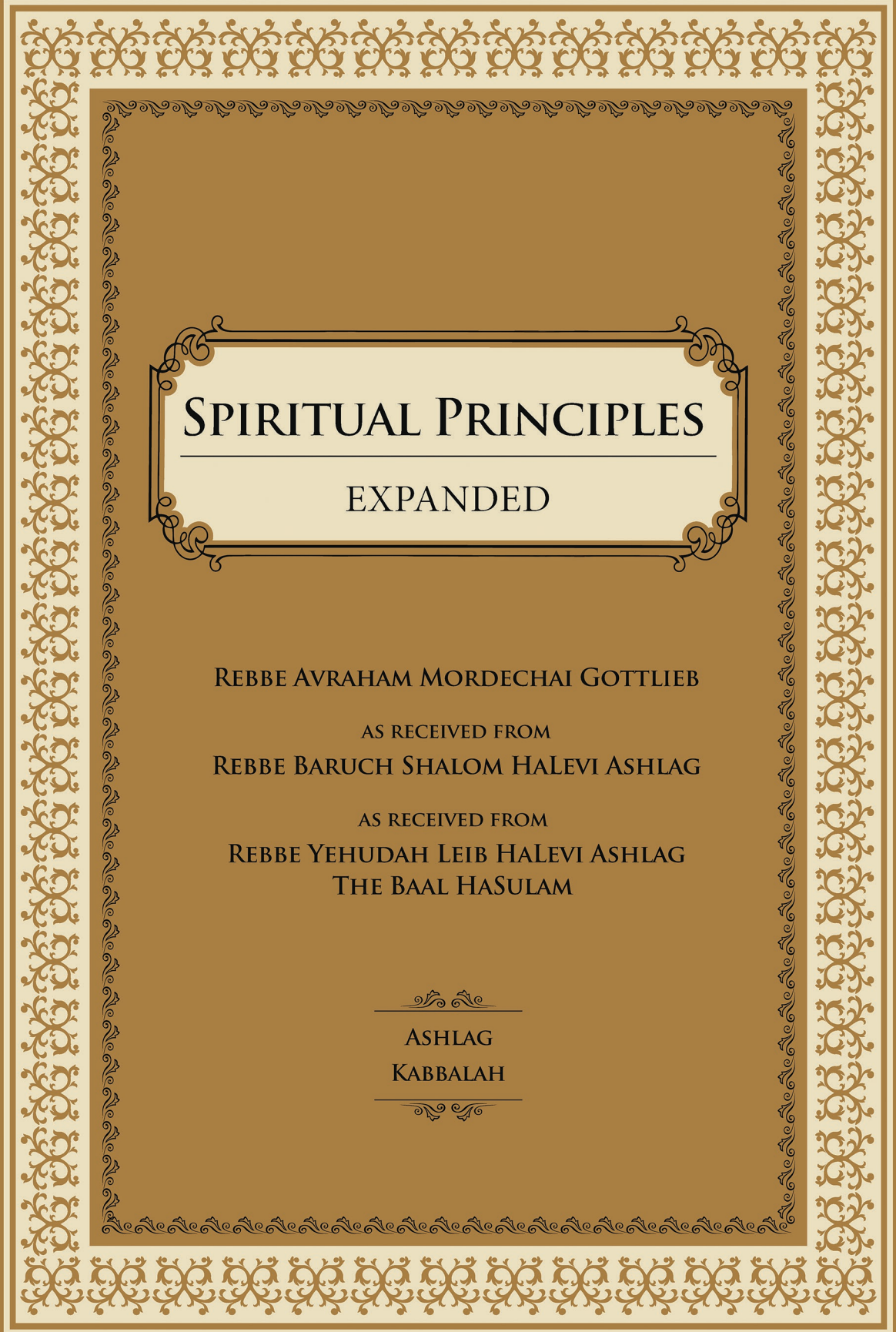




SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

EXPANDED

REBBE AVRAHAM MORDECHAI GOTTLIEB

AS RECEIVED FROM

REBBE BARUCH SHALOM HALEVI ASHLAG

AS RECEIVED FROM

REBBE YEHUDAH LEIB HALEVI ASHLAG
THE BAAL HASULAM



ASHLAG
KABBALAH



בס"ד

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

EXPANDED



Translated from the spiritual writings of
Rebbe Avraham Mordechai Gottlieb

spiritual disciple of
Rebbe Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag ztz"l

spiritual disciple of
Rebbe Yehudah Leib HaLevi Ashlag ztz"l
The Baal HaSulam

מתורגם מתוך כתבי הקודש של
רבי אברהם מרדכי גוטליב

תלמיד כ"ק אדמו"ר רבי ברוך שלום הלוי אשלג זי"ע

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SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES



Kabbalah is the inner spiritual wisdom of Judaism.

Its purpose is to awaken us to our higher calling
and guide us on our wondrous spiritual journey.

Introduction

This book is translated from the holy writings of Rebbe Avraham Mordechai Gottlieb.

The spiritual method translated here is an extremely valuable treasure. Although the method is ancient, it is revolutionary for it to be expressed so simply and clearly.

The translation is primarily from a chapter of Rebbe Gottlieb's book HaSulam, originally written in Hebrew.

Everything in the standard typeface is the translation. Everything in this alternate typeface is written by me, Avraham Loewenthal, reflecting on and discussing the principles.

Rebbe Gottlieb is a spiritual master. I am a simple disciple, trying to learn and work with these teachings. Having been blessed to learn these principles for many years, I am sharing some of the insights I have received along the way. Yet the more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know — so I ask forgiveness for anything written here that may be a mistaken understanding.

Although this book is only a brief introduction to Kabbalah, these few pages — if taken to heart — can be life changing. The meaning of life and joyfulness that Kabbalah has to give us is beyond what words can express. This spiritual wisdom has been a boundless blessing in my life, and I hope it will be for you as well.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

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“The main essence of redemption is internal and already exists within ourselves. It only needs to be revealed.”

Rebbe Avraham Mordechai Gottlieb

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

The following principles are an extremely condensed outline of the method of spiritual practice the Baal HaSulam taught his students.

The Baal HaSulam, Rebbe Yehudah Leib HaLevi Ashlag *ztz"l*, after years of tremendous effort, attained the state of *d'vekut* — union with God. The spiritual method that the Baal HaSulam used is not a new system that he came up with. He learned it from his holy Rebbes the Admorim of Kaloshin, Porisov, and Belz. This method has actually been used by *tzadeekim* throughout the generations since ancient times. It was passed down from our ancestors Avraham, Yitzchak, Yakov, the Prophets, the Tannaim, all the way down to the Ari HaKadosh, the Baal Shem Tov, the Vilna Gaon, and the Ramchal. Although there is nothing new about the system itself, the Baal HaSulam found grace in the eyes of God and was given permission to reveal these spiritual principles and method of spiritual attainment in a wonderfully simple and clear way, and in a way that is fitting for our time now at the dawning of *mashiach*.

PRINCIPLE 1
THE SOURCE OF REALITY

The source of all reality is God giving goodness.
God gives goodness to everybody.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

This first principle is very short, yet contains so much. Right away we are talking about God — but what does that mean?

Kabbalah says the essence of God is completely beyond our comprehension. It is something we cannot understand at all. So what do we talk about? We talk about what we can experience.

People who reach very high levels of spiritual awareness experience that there is a source of reality bestowing boundless goodness to everybody — a giving that flows from pure unconditional love.

They experience the source of reality manifesting our entire existence in order to give goodness to us — a goodness beyond anything we could dream of. They see that everything we go through is part of the process of becoming ready and able to experience this goodness. The spiritual masters, like the Baal HaSulam from whom we are learning, are not philosophizing but speaking from direct experience.

So when we talk about God in Judaism, we are talking about what people have experienced — and what every one of us is here to experience — the source of reality bestowing boundless goodness and unconditional love to everyone.

Kabbalah calls this “the purpose of creation”. This is the beginning of what we can speak about — the source of reality in relationship to ourselves. The source of reality independent of our relationship with it is beyond what we can comprehend. Everything Judaism says about God is about our relationship with God and our experience of God.

THE SOURCE OF REALITY

Many people ask if they need to believe in God in order to learn Kabbalah. The answer is no. But what does it even mean to “believe in God”?

Many people say they believe in God and many say they don’t — but those are only words. If a person believed in God, truly believed that the source of reality is bestowing boundless goodness to us, and that everything that happens flows from God’s goodness, that person would be joyful every moment. How many people are joyful every moment? That’s how many people completely believe in God.

Belief in God is an exalted spiritual level. It isn’t where we begin. It is what we are working to attain. Also, belief in God is not something we either have or don’t. There are many levels and depths of belief. How exalted is the source of reality we are contemplating?

When someone once told the holy Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev that he didn’t believe in God, the Rebbe replied: “The God you don’t believe in — I don’t believe in either.”

Kabbalah is all about the subject of believing in God. Right now, we are in the middle of the journey. On the one hand, if we appreciate our material reality, it is simply divine. We are living on a ball of earth spinning through endless space. The sun — so vast that a million earths could fit inside it — is blowing up every moment, while our world is at just the right distance and just the right tilt and just the right spin that we can live. Our hearts are continuously beating and every moment we are gifted a new breath of life. If we simply appreciate our physical reality, the beauty of nature, and the miraculousness of existence —

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

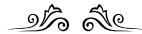
life is glorious. We are living every moment in wondrous miracles. This gloriousness did not just appear by chance. Of course there is God.

On the other hand, when we look at our social reality, there is so much suffering in the world. Where is God?

So is there God or isn't there?

The spiritual masters tell us that there is. They know this because they are experiencing God. They see that everything we are going through is preparing us to experience goodness beyond anything we can imagine. They see that the goodness is hidden until we are ready to experience it in the ultimate way.

The first principle begins with what we can start to speak about, what the spiritual masters have experienced — the source of reality bestowing goodness to everybody.



PRINCIPLE 2

THE GOODNESS



As there is no pleasure greater and more wonderful than experiencing God, the essence of the goodness that God desires to give is — experiencing God.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

The first principle said that the source of reality is giving goodness to everyone. How great a goodness? Beyond anything we can imagine.

The second principle explains the nature of this goodness. It says it is the most wondrous pleasure that could be — the pleasure of experiencing the source of reality.

Kabbalah explains that all the pleasures of our material world are only *neheeru dekeek* — pleasures as minuscule as a grain of sand, compared with pleasures more vast than the entire universe. The pleasure of experiencing God is beyond anything we can dream of.

Since we were created to enjoy, we need pleasure to live. If we have no enjoyment in life and no hope of ever enjoying, we lose our desire to live. We need pleasure the same way we need oxygen to exist. Kabbalah explains that material pleasures are only here to sustain us until we are ready for the higher spiritual pleasures.

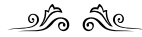
Imagine we are sitting at a table with delicious food. We are hungry and ready to enjoy it, when suddenly one of the most important people in the world walks into the room. Imagine how we would feel at that moment. Even if this person sat down with us and said, “please eat”, we would no longer care about the food. The pleasure of eating would be insignificant compared to the much greater pleasure of being in the presence of someone so important.

Contemplating this metaphor, we see how the pleasure of being in the presence of someone very important can surpass a material pleasure like eating. Yet no matter how great the person is, it is still only a

THE GOODNESS

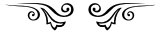
person. If the source of reality were to come into the room — into our consciousness — all material pleasures would fall away. We would enjoy a pleasure so much greater — the pleasure of being in the presence of God.

The first principle said that the source of reality is God giving goodness. The second principle reveals that the essence of this goodness is the most wondrous pleasure of all — the pleasure of experiencing God.



PRINCIPLE 3

THE DESIRE TO RECEIVE



God created in our souls a desire to receive pleasure. This is so that we will be able to enjoy the goodness and pleasure that God wants to give us. If we had no desire to receive, we would not be able to enjoy God's gift. The more we desire something, the more we can enjoy it.

THE DESIRE TO RECEIVE

The first principle said that the source of reality is bestowing goodness to us. The second principle explained that this goodness is the greatest of all pleasures — the pleasure of experiencing God. The third principle now turns to the concept of pleasure itself.

We experience pleasure when we receive something we desire. The greater our desire, the greater the pleasure we feel when it is fulfilled. For example, if we were to drink a cup of water right now, we would experience a small pleasure. But if we hadn't had a drink for a couple of days, the same cup of water would give us immense pleasure. The water didn't change. What changed was our desire. We see that our desire for something determines how much we enjoy it.

Although the essence of God is unknowable, our spiritual masters experience that the source of reality is purely giving, with no desire to receive at all. The desire to receive is something entirely new that God created — something that does not exist in the source of reality. We were given this desire so that we can enjoy God's gift of goodness.

The goodness and pleasure God created us to experience is beyond anything we can imagine. Embedded within our souls is a desire to receive that is that vast. Kabbalah explains that the souls of everyone in the world — together with the souls of everyone who ever lived and who will ever live — are all one universal soul, called the soul of Adam and Eve. Embedded in this universal soul, containing all of our individual souls, is the desire to receive the boundless, eternal goodness we were created to enjoy.

PRINCIPLE 4
GOD DOES NOT NEED ANYTHING

God's perfection is absolute. Therefore, receiving is not relevant to God. Wanting to receive something means that something is lacking. As nothing is lacking in God, the desire to receive is not relevant to God.

GOD DOES NOT NEED ANYTHING

Principle four says that God is not lacking anything and has no desire to receive. Desire to receive is something new that was brought into existence so that we can enjoy God's goodness. The source of reality is purely loving and giving.

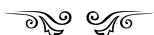
All of creation and everything we experience in our lives consists of levels of desire to receive. Desire to receive is what moves everything. We don't even move a finger from one place to another unless we think it will somehow benefit us. Every movement expresses a desire to receive.

Mineral, plant, animal, and human are all levels of the desire to receive. Minerals may appear dormant, yet within them there is constant movement and activity. All of that comes from the desire to receive. Of course, the desire to receive of a rock is less than the desire to receive of a plant, which is less than the desire to receive of an animal, which is less than the desire to receive of a human. Although there are different levels, all of creation desires to receive. The source of reality is purely giving, and creation is the desire to receive.

Does the source of reality desiring to give imply that it has a desire to receive? Is the giving meant to benefit the source of reality in some way? Kabbalah says no. The source of reality is in a state of absolute perfection, with no need to receive anything. The bestowal of goodness that manifests all of our reality flows from unconditional love — a giving that is entirely for us.

PRINCIPLE 5

CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE



God's desire is to give. The creation's desire is to receive. This state of creation's attribute being opposite to that of God spiritually distances creation from God.

Spiritual reality transcends the dimensions of time and space. Therefore, closeness and distance in spirituality are measures of similarity and difference. We see in our physical reality that if two people have completely opposite behaviors and opinions, they are not able to connect with each other. It is the same spiritually. Even though God's glory fills the entire universe, our desire to receive is opposite from God's desire to give and therefore distances us from God.

We connect with God and become able to experience God when our attributes become similar to those of God. This is what the Sages mean when they speak about attaining the state of *d'vekut*, union with God. As God's desire is to give, our connection with God depends on how much we also desire to give.

CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE

Kabbalah helps us develop the awareness that we are spiritual beings. We are divine souls that exist beyond the physical dimensions of time and space. We are temporarily clothed in bodies that live within time.

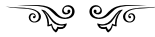
Since spiritual reality transcends time and space, what does closeness and distance mean spiritually? Principle five explains that in spirituality, closeness and distance are measures of similarity and difference. The more two things are alike, the closer they are spiritually. The more they differ, the more spiritually distant they are.

The previous principles explained that the source of reality is only giving, while the essence of creation is the desire to receive. This means that in spiritual terms, the Creator and the creation are opposites and therefore as distant as can be. Even though God is everywhere, our opposite attributes create a spiritual distance between us and God.

We previously learned that the desire to receive was created so that we can enjoy God's gift, and that this desire is something positive. Now we learn that it also distances us from God. There is a lot to unpack here. For now, this principle simply explains what closeness and distance mean in spirituality. Closeness is a measure of similarity, and distance is a measure of difference. God's desire to give and the creation's desire to receive create a situation in which we are spiritually distant from God because of our opposite attributes.

The last sentence of this principle says: "As God's desire is to give, our connection with God depends on how much we also desire to give." Our spiritual development toward attaining the desire to give will be explored in the following principles.

PRINCIPLE 6 SPIRITUAL WORK



The desire to receive that is imprinted in our souls plays an important role: it enables us to enjoy the gift of God's goodness. The state of receiving, however, causes us to be spiritually distant from God because receiving is opposite to God's attribute of giving. In order for us to be able to experience the gift of God's goodness in a state of union with God, our receiving needs to be elevated to a state of giving. Our spiritual work is to attain this state of giving.

Spiritual work does not involve a variety of different endeavors as many people think. Spiritual work is only a matter of transcending our desire to receive and attaining the desire to give. Everything else is only a branch rooted in this transformation.

SPIRITUAL WORK

Some people think that God's goodness is hidden from us now so that we can earn it through spiritual work — that if we earn it, we will enjoy it more than if it were a gift. The Baal HaSulam says this understanding is mistaken. What could we possibly do in a hundred years of life that would earn us eternal goodness? It would be like working for five minutes and being paid a billion dollars. Would five minutes of work make the billion dollars any less of a gift?

The purpose of our spiritual work is rooted in a foundational principle of Kabbalah called the *tzimtzum*. To understand the *tzimtzum*, Kabbalah has us contemplate the primal moment of creation. The moment the source of reality desires to bestow goodness, creation comes into existence. Our universal soul is born into a spiritual reality that transcends time and space, instantly filled with God's boundless goodness. In one cosmic moment, we emerge with the desire to receive God's goodness, are given the goodness, and enjoy it.

The source of reality wants to give. The moment we are created, we are given the goodness and we enjoy. Everything is perfect. What else needs to happen? Why don't we continue to experience the goodness forever? When contemplating God, this is the big question — if we were created to enjoy God's goodness, why aren't we experiencing it? Why is there so much suffering? Why isn't everyone in the world experiencing all the boundless goodness we were created to enjoy right now?

In that primal cosmic moment, the source of reality is purely giving and we are purely receiving. Although we enjoy God's goodness, we are spiritually distant from God because giving and receiving are opposites.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

For us to attain deeper union with God, the *tzimtzum* was put into effect. The goodness is hidden from us, and we are left with only a minuscule amount of pleasure, called *neheeru dekeek*. Time and space come into existence and our physical reality is manifest.

In this new realm of reality our universal soul fragments into billions of individual souls, and we become temporarily clothed in physical bodies. All that remains of the divine goodness and pleasure we experienced before the *tzimtzum* is the *neheeru dekeek*. This pleasure, in relation to the original pleasure, is like a grain of sand compared to the universe. These remaining micro-pleasures are just enough to keep us alive. The *neheeru dekeek* encompasses all the material pleasures of the world.

The *tzimtzum* was put into effect so that we can learn to experience the divine goodness in a state of giving rather than receiving. The *tzimtzum* hides the goodness and reveals it only to the extent that we develop our giving and love. Before the *tzimtzum*, we received God's goodness in a state of receiving, which distanced us from our divine source. After the *tzimtzum*, the goodness is experienced only when we are in a state of giving that is in union with our divine source.

Tzimtzum literally means "constriction". It is a new stage of reality in which receiving God's goodness in a self-serving way is no longer possible. We can receive God's goodness only in a state of giving.

What does it mean to receive in a state of giving? Imagine that someone we love very much gives us a present that we don't like. Even though we don't want the gift, we joyfully receive it because we love the person who is giving it. We receive the gift, but it is really an act of giving. We receive it to give enjoyment to the one we love. Even if the gift is something we

SPIRITUAL WORK

want, as long as we love the person more than the gift, and we receive it to give them joy, our receiving is an act of giving. Enjoying because the one we love wants us to enjoy is receiving to give.

The purpose of the *tzimtzum* is for us to learn how to receive God's boundless goodness in a state of giving and love. At first, God was giving and we were receiving. Then the *tzimtzum* was put into place so that we could develop our giving and love. At the end of the process, when our love for God is greater than our love of God's gift, God is giving and we are receiving in order to give. Initially, God was loving us and we were receiving the love. In the end, God is loving us and we are loving back. The journey of our souls is the most beautiful cosmic love story.

We wonder why God doesn't reveal all the goodness to us right now. The reason is that if the *tzimtzum* were taken away, we would be right back where we started. God would be purely giving, and we would be purely receiving. We would experience God's goodness, but be spiritually distant. In order to experience God's goodness in union with God, we need to learn to receive it in a state of giving and love.

Kabbalah explains that everything we go through in our lives is to help us learn to receive God's goodness in a state of giving and love. This is why our material reality was brought into existence, and it is perfectly designed for this purpose. We were already experiencing God's goodness before the *tzimtzum*. The only reason the *tzimtzum* now hides that goodness from us is so that we can learn to experience it in a more beautiful way. Until we develop our giving and love, we experience only the *neheeru dekeek* micro-pleasures of our material world. As we develop our giving and love, the higher pleasures are revealed to us.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

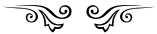
Our life is the spiritual journey of learning to love. We are learning to love the giver of the gift even more than the gift. No matter how glorious and pleasurable the gift is, the giver of the gift is infinitely more precious.

The essence of all our spiritual work is developing our giving and love. This is not as easy as it sounds. The more we realize that this is the entire purpose of our lives, the more we realize the importance of spiritual learning and practice.



PRINCIPLE 7

THE FOUR STAGES



There are four general stages of spiritual development:

1) Receiving to receive

The desire to receive is ingrained in our nature. This is where we begin. We were purposely created with this desire to receive, and given the spiritual work of elevating this desire to its perfected state. In this first stage we care only about ourselves and fulfilling our personal desires.

2) Giving to receive

This stage of spiritual development is an intermediate stage between the previous level of loving only ourselves and the next level of truly loving others and having unconditional love for God. In this stage a person is involved in spiritual work and is giving to others. The motivation for the spiritual work and giving, however, is not yet from a place of pure love of the other, but is rather motivated by the hope of receiving a reward.

In this stage we are giving but our intention is to receive.

3) Giving to give

This is a state of being able to give only with intention to give. The giving is motivated purely by love. There is no desire to receive anything in return for the giving — not in this world and not in the world to come.

The Sages refer to this exalted spiritual level as *l'shem shamayim*. It is also called the stage of *tikun*, fixing.

This stage is not the final purpose because we were created to receive, not to give. We were created to receive all the pleasure and enjoyment of God's gift. Attaining a state of pure giving, however, is a necessary prerequisite for us to be able to progress to the next and final stage of being able to experience God's goodness in the ultimate way.

4) Receiving to give

Once we have attained the very high spiritual level of being able to give only with intention to give, it is then possible to come to this final stage of receiving to give.

In this stage two conditions are met:

- 1) We enjoy the pleasure of God's goodness.
- 2) Our receiving of the enjoyment is not motivated by wanting to fulfill our desire to receive. We receive God's goodness as an act of giving to God — to fulfill God's desire for us to enjoy.

We are now able to receive all the goodness that we were created to experience, and since our receiving is with the intention of giving, we

THE FOUR STAGES

are in alignment with God's attribute of giving. There is no longer the separation inherent in God giving and us receiving because we are also in a state of giving.

This stage also enables us to experience God's goodness in an unlimited way. Receiving is finite. Giving is limitless.

In this final stage of receiving to give we experience God's goodness in the ultimate way. This is the purpose of creation — *matarat habriya*.

A way to determine if we are receiving because of our love for God and not for our own self-benefit is to see if we are willing to have all the rewards for our effort be given to others instead of to us.



The four main stages of spiritual development correspond to the four letters of the divine name ה-ו-ה-י :

The letter י corresponds with receiving to give.

The letter ה corresponds with giving to give.

The letter ו corresponds with giving to receive.

The letter ה corresponds with receiving to receive.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

Principle seven maps out the four main stages of spiritual development. There are countless spiritual levels, but these are the four main categories. These four levels correspond to the four letters of the divine name: ה - ו - ה - י

Kabbalah discusses many different divine names, each expressing a particular aspect of experiencing God. The divine name ה - ו - ה - י, called *Shem Havaya*, is the holiest of all the names. All other divine names are branches of *Shem Havaya*. It is like a spiritual DNA that has everything encoded in it.

Encoded in *Shem Havaya* is the process through which God's boundless goodness becomes hidden in our present reality, and how we spiritually develop to experience the goodness. The four main categories of spiritual development that correspond to the four letters of *Shem Havaya* are:

Receiving to receive
Giving to receive
Giving to give
Receiving to give

RECEIVING TO RECEIVE

The lowest level, "receiving to receive", is where we all begin. At this stage, we are focused on ourselves and on fulfilling our personal desires. Although we start under the control of our desire to receive, our inner divine essence is the opposite — giving and loving. Our spiritual development is the process of revealing our divine essence of giving and love.

THE FOUR STAGES

GIVING TO RECEIVE

The next stage of spiritual development is “giving to receive”. At this stage we are giving, but our motivation is to receive something in return. The action is giving, but the intention is to receive. Until we reach a high spiritual level, all our giving is in order to receive. We are hardwired with desire to receive, and it motivates everything we do — even our acts of giving. To give purely from love, without intention to receive from the giving, is not a simple matter. It is the ultimate destination of our souls. The spiritual journey of our lives is our learning to love.

One time, Rebbe Baruch Shalom told his students that he was at a celebration where he encountered someone on a very high spiritual level. All night long, this person was giving food and drinks to everyone and constantly serving those around him. Who was this holy spiritual master? The Rebbe smiled and said — the waiter. Although the waiter may indeed be on a high spiritual level, that can't be known from his service. He isn't serving because he loves everyone so much — he's being paid. If he weren't being paid, he wouldn't be serving. The waiter is giving, but the intention is to receive. Until we reach a high spiritual level, all of our giving is just like the waiter's.

At the stage of giving to receive, everything we give is done with the hope of getting something in return. Although at this stage there is no way out of wanting to get, the highest thing we can want to receive is the ability to purely give. We can yearn to be given the ability to transcend our self-interest and truly give from love. What we want to receive from our giving is the desire to give. This is giving to receive in its highest form. We engage in spiritual practice and acts of giving with the intention of receiving from them the ability to truly give from love.

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Spiritual practice that is not done with the conscious intention of developing our giving and love is not directed toward that goal. The intention is to get something from it — either in this world or the world to come. In that case, the spiritual practice is not done from love, but as an investment. It is just like the waiter. To reach the next level of “giving to give”, we need to consciously direct our spiritual practice toward the goal of giving purely from love.

Everyone begins spiritual practice wanting to get something from it. This is a necessary stage and is how we all begin. Even though this stage of spirituality is still self-serving, it is already a step above being involved only in material matters. Spiritual practice brings great blessing to our lives and it's important to appreciate how much we benefit from it. That appreciation strengthens our motivation and helps us give more importance to our spirituality.

The next step is developing awareness that everything we do — even spiritual practice — is self-serving. From this awareness, we begin to realize that we need to develop our giving and love. This is where real spiritual work begins. At first, our spiritual practice was about striving to get. Now, it becomes about striving to give. The moment we become interested in transcending our self-centeredness and developing our giving and love, we are ready to appreciate Kabbalah, which is here to guide us on our spiritual journey.

GIVING TO GIVE

When we have completed the deep spiritual work of developing our desire to give, we are brought to the next spiritual level — “giving to

THE FOUR STAGES

give”. At this stage, we are able to give purely from love. We have no desire to receive anything in return for our giving — not in this world and not in the world to come. This state of unconditional love is an exalted spiritual level. The level of giving to give is what the Sages call *d'vekut* — union with God.

Giving to give might sound like it's not so difficult, but the more we try, the more we see how challenging it is. Through spiritual practice we become increasingly aware of why we do what we do, and we see how much we are motivated by self-interest. The more effort we make to transcend our self-interest and truly give and love, the more impossible it seems. Even though it seems impossible, Kabbalah says that not only is it possible — it is the very reason we are here. Everything we go through in our lives is helping us learn to love more deeply.

Until we reach the level of giving to give, the closest experience we have of it is the love of parents for their children. This unconditional love is built into our nature. We have the natural capacity, as parents, to love our children so deeply that their happiness is more precious to us than our own. This gives a taste of unconditional love, yet it is still love that comes from our nature. The spiritual level of giving to give is love that goes beyond our nature — the love that parents have for their children, extended to everyone in the world.

Giving to give is an extremely high spiritual level — a state of union with God. A person who has reached this is called a *tzadeek* or a *tzadeeka*. When humanity as a whole evolves to this spiritual level, it is called *tikun olam* — the fixing of the world. Once we have attained the exalted level of giving to give, we are ready for the final stage: receiving to give.

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RECEIVING TO GIVE

“Receiving to give” is the stage of *matarat habriya* — the purpose of creation. Although giving to give is a state of union with God, we were not created only to give. We were created to receive and enjoy God’s goodness. Giving to give prepares us for the level of receiving to give.

In this final stage of receiving to give, we receive and enjoy the divine goodness we were created to experience. We receive the goodness not to serve ourselves, but because God desires to bestow it to us. Our enjoyment itself becomes an act of giving and love.

Our receiving is not “to give” just by saying it is — it has to actually be true. This is only possible when our love has reached the level where giving is more important to us than receiving. God is more precious to us than what God gives us. We love God so deeply that we want to do whatever God wants us to do. If God wants us to clean the toilet, we will clean the toilet. If God wants us to experience infinite goodness forever, then we will do that. We want whatever God wants.

We need to reach this state of unconditional love before it is possible to receive to give. First, our love needs to be so deep that we desire to give. Then, we can receive to give — we can enjoy God’s goodness because God wants us to enjoy.

We are souls that exist beyond time and space, and when we are ready, we will experience our spiritual reality. God’s boundless love for us will be revealed, and we will love in return. Everything we are going through now is part of our epic journey toward unconditional love and our learning to experience God’s boundless goodness in the most beautiful way.

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At the end of principle seven it says, "A way to determine if we are receiving because of our love for God and not for our own self-benefit is to see if we are willing to have all the rewards for our effort be given to others instead of to us." This helps us realize that receiving to give is far more profound than it may seem. If we want to receive God's goodness only because God wants to give, then it wouldn't matter to us if someone else receives the goodness instead of ourselves. As long as it matters to us that we personally experience the goodness, we are still serving our own desire to receive.

Imagine, for example, that God wants to give the pleasure of a million dollars to someone. If the only reason I want to receive the million dollars is to fulfill God's desire to give it to someone, then it wouldn't matter to me whether I receive it or someone else does. We can see that receiving God's goodness only because of love is much deeper than it sounds.



PRINCIPLE 8 HEART AND MIND



Our desire to receive has two aspects:

1) **Heart.** The heart aspect of our desire to receive is our desire to feel and experience pleasure. This includes all physical pleasures. This also includes pleasures such as money, honor, and intellectual enjoyments. This also includes spiritual pleasures when they are enjoyed in a self-serving manner.

2) **Mind.** The mind aspect of our desire to receive wants to understand.

These two aspects of our desire to receive work together within us and are actually two sides of the same coin.

There is a *tikun*, meaning a spiritual fixing, for each of these two aspects of our desire to receive:

1) The *tikun* that corresponds to our heart is the spiritual work of giving called *hashpa'ah*.

2) The *tikun* that corresponds to our mind is the spiritual work of believing called *emuna*.

Spiritual work involves both of these realms of heart and mind. If we were to work only on the heart aspect of our desire to receive, our giving would be disconnected from God. Through the work of the mind, the spiritual work of *emuna*, we connect ourselves to God. If we were to work only on the mind aspect, our spiritual work of *emuna* could be rooted in serving ourselves. The work of the heart is the work of attaining the desire to give.

HEART AND MIND

Principle eight begins by explaining that our desire to receive has two aspects: heart and mind. These are not referring to parts of our body, but are meant metaphorically. The heart aspect of our desire to receive is our desire to enjoy. The mind aspect of our desire to receive is our desire to understand. Both play an important role in our ability to enjoy God's goodness, and we are given the spiritual work of elevating them. For each aspect there is a *tikun* — a spiritual fixing.

The heart aspect of our desire to receive is our natural love of ourselves and our wanting to get whatever serves our self-interest. The *tikun* of the heart is to develop love for others and give to them.

The mind aspect of our desire to receive is our desire to understand. The *tikun* of the mind is to develop *emuna*. There is no exact translation of *emuna* in English — it is something like belief, but much more. *Emuna* is a state of believing in God's goodness that transcends the limitations of our mind. It is a state of elevated consciousness, divine awareness, and unconditional love. *Emuna* is intimately connected with love because the more we love, the more we trust and the less we need to understand. We believe in the one we love.

Principle eight goes on to discuss the spiritual work of both the heart and the mind. Here, at the beginning of this principle, we learn that spiritual work involves both of these realms. Through the work of the heart, we learn to transcend our ego and develop our love and desire to give. Through the work of the mind, we develop *emuna* and connect ourselves to God. Developing our love, giving, and *emuna* is what our spiritual development is all about.

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THE WORK OF THE HEART: GIVING

The spiritual work of giving corresponds to the heart aspect of our desire to receive. This work consists of taking something that we desire and giving it to someone else instead. The purpose of this giving is to bring us to the state of loving others. As it says in the Torah, “Love your friend as yourself.” This aspect of spiritual work involves continuously making an effort in a deep and organized way to contemplate the needs and concerns of our friends, and then doing our best to help them. The work is to be concerned with the needs of our friends to the same extent that we are concerned with our own needs. This spiritual work of giving to our friends is a daily practice of overcoming our natural desire to be concerned only for ourselves.

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We spend most of our day focused on ourselves and trying to fulfill our desires. We go to work and help others because, in one way or another, we hope to benefit from it. Everything we do is rooted in the desire to receive something in return. This is our natural state. Our inner divine essence is the opposite. It is purely giving and loving. The work of the heart is to reveal our divine essence of giving and love.

Giving doesn't just mean handing someone a few dollars. Giving money can be important, but it doesn't necessarily develop our love. Giving a small amount of money doesn't cost us much, and is often motivated by wanting to feel good about ourselves. The spiritual work of giving is striving to develop love for the people we are giving to. The goal is to love others as much as we love ourselves. Although giving charity is important, the spiritual work of the heart goes much deeper than giving charity.

It is a nice idea to love everyone, but how can we actually do that? We don't love just by saying we do. We spend time helping the people we love. We are happy to give up things we want for ourselves to bring joy to them. We can easily say we love everybody, but it's not true. Love means truly caring and doing what we can for those we love.

So how can we love everyone? We start by developing our love for the people closest to us. When we begin the spiritual work of the heart and try to love our friends as much as we love ourselves, we see how hard it is to develop our love even for our friends. The work of the heart begins with our spouse, our family, and our close friends. As we grow spiritually, we can gradually expand the circle outwards.

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Some insights into the work of the heart:

1) The spiritual work of loving and giving to others is not to remain a philosophy, but needs to be actively practiced. We don't know how hard it is not to be self-centered until we actually try to do it.

We spend nearly all day thinking about and doing for ourselves. The spiritual work of developing our love for others means spending time thinking about other people and doing for them. We begin with our close friends. The work is to take time to consider what we can do for them — and then actually do it. When we do this sincerely, we start to see what we are willing to give up for our friends and what is hard for us to give. We see how much love we already have and how much our love still needs to grow.

Rebbe Baruch Shalom Ashlag would say, “I have not yet met a person who paces from wall to wall, concerned, thinking, ‘Master of the World, what can I do for my friends?’” When we have problems, we are naturally concerned about them, and sometimes they keep us awake at night. Do we have the same concern when our friends have problems? Are we unable to sleep thinking about what we can do to help? Of course we love our friends, but to love them as much as we love ourselves is what we are here to develop.

2) The work of the heart is to give without desiring anything in return. Many people are giving, but are motivated by expectations of receiving something from the giving. The spiritual work is to strive to give without any inner hope of receiving something in return. When we want to receive

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something, we are actually involved in receiving rather than giving. The goal is to be able to give to others out of love for others, and serve God out of love for God.

When we want to receive something from our giving, we are actually involved in receiving rather than giving. This is a powerful realization. Until we transcend our self-interest and reach the high spiritual level of giving to give, our giving is motivated by wanting to get something from it. The spiritual work of giving involves developing awareness of what we hope to receive from our giving, and then elevating what it is that we want to receive. Ideally, what we want to receive from our giving is the ability to give purely from love.

3) Many people give to others in a way that has nothing to do with connecting with God. The giving is motivated by the person's conscience, by wanting to be humane, or by wanting to build a just society. While this type of giving plays an important role in the world and is not to be belittled, it is actually not the essence of giving. The goal is not to be in service to other people, but rather to be in service to God.

This idea can be difficult to understand. Why can't our giving be motivated simply by conscience and the desire to build a just society? While creating a just society is essential, the goal is something even greater. We are spiritually developing toward experiencing the source of reality in a state of oneness and unconditional love. The purpose of the spiritual work of giving is not only to deepen our love for others, but also to develop our connection with the source of reality.

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4) The purpose of giving to others is to reach the state of loving others. If we feel ourselves superior to others, we are not able to truly love them. Our relationships need to be based on equality. An act of charity, even though it is beautiful and important in and of itself, does not develop our love for the other person. Yes, we did what needed to be done, but as long as we return home without maintaining our connection to the person in need, we are not developing our love.

The spiritual work of giving is much more than giving charity. It is the work of transforming the entire focus of our lives — from striving to get, to striving to give. To do this, we need to develop our love for one another.

When giving money to someone in the street whom we don't know, we can ask ourselves: Why am I giving this money? How much do I really care about the person? Am I giving to feel good about myself, or to avoid feeling bad that I didn't give? Am I giving to develop my love for this person?

The spiritual work of giving involves striving to become aware of our true intentions. Although giving to people we may never see again is also important, the main work of giving is with those we are close to — the people with whom we can develop our love.

The spiritual work of giving doesn't mean giving everything we have away. If we did that, how would we care for ourselves and our families? It is important to give in a healthy way and to consider where to focus our giving. In some situations, giving is unhealthy — both for the giver and the receiver. Giving in one place often means we won't be able to

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give somewhere else. It is essential to be conscious about what we give, to whom we give, and why we give.

When we give to someone, we naturally expect the person to be thankful. Yet the one who gives is actually the one who should be most grateful. The person receiving gains something material, while the person giving gains something far greater — the opportunity to grow spiritually through the giving. When we give, we can strive to be truly thankful for our giving.

5) When we are involved in the spiritual work of giving, with our intention being to completely nullify our ego, then our desire to receive refuses to cooperate every step of the way. Our ego sees that its existence is threatened and revolts with all its might. The ego tries to undermine our spiritual work by questioning our belief in God. The ego asks, “What is the purpose of this spiritual work of giving?” When we are not interested in nullifying our desire to receive, our ego doesn’t ask questions and bother us, and even helps us perform acts of giving. The ego is built up by these acts of giving.

When it says ego here, it refers to our desire to receive. Until we reach the level of giving to give, we are motivated by our desire to receive. This ego aspect of ourselves influences everything we do. As long as we want to get something from our spiritual practice, our desire to receive is engaged and motivates us. The moment we want to do something beyond our self-benefit, our desire to receive resists and says, “There is nothing to get from that — so why do it?”

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The extent to which we try to transcend our desire to receive is the extent to which we feel resistance. If we don't feel any resistance in our spiritual practice, it means our practice is serving our desire to receive. When we start to make an effort to free ourselves from the control of our desire to receive, it resists. Then, the two main questions arise: "How do you know there is God?" and "Why give?" When these questions arise within us, it is a good sign. It means we are doing real inner work, and our desire to receive is trying to undermine it.

These questions are not really intellectual questions, so it's not helpful to engage with them on an intellectual level. These questions come from the gut. The spiritual work is to answer them with action.

The answer to "How do you know there is God?" is to believe.
The answer to "Why give?" is to give.

The stronger the questions, the more effort it takes to believe and to give. That effort is our spiritual work. The effort itself is everything we can do. The amount of effort we make is exactly the measure of our spiritual work — and exactly the measure of our spiritual development.

In Kabbalah, spiritual work is called making a *masach*. A *masach* is any effort we make to transcend our desire to receive. Striving to believe in God's goodness or striving to truly give involves making a *masach*. If we are working to overcome a small desire to receive, the *masach* we need to make is small. If we are working to overcome a great desire to receive, we need to make a big *masach*. The size of the *masach* is the measure of how much effort we are making.

Although we don't naturally appreciate having to make an effort, Kabbalah explains that our effort is precious. The amount of effort we

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make is the exact measure of our spiritual development. Our effort to give is our giving. Our effort to believe is our believing. Our effort to love is our love.

6) The only real “giving” is when we give up something we desire and give it to another instead.

When we give something that is easy for us to give, the person we give to may benefit but we don't develop spiritually from it. We grow spiritually through the effort it takes to give. If we are not giving up anything, there is no effort involved. Without effort, there is no spiritual development.

7) The spiritual path of loving others involves fulfilling the material needs of others. This means giving things like attention or money. Our spiritual work is to care about other people's material well-being. What does it mean to give? It is giving something that is precious to us. Looking to fix other people and give them spiritual advice is not giving, because we are not giving up anything. This is self-serving, as it gives us the ego gratification of feeling superior to others. The true path towards loving others is seeing their good traits.

Our spiritual work is to develop our love for others. This means focusing on the good in others. If we are focused on someone's goodness, why would we feel the need to give them spiritual advice?

Rebbe Baruch Shalom would say that when someone gives spiritual advice, it is usually to be controlling — not out of genuine care for the other person. The spiritual work of giving involves giving materially.

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Giving spiritual advice is easy because it costs nothing and makes the one giving it feel superior. Giving something material, on the other hand, requires us to give something up and therefore truly give of ourselves.

Imagine, for example, that a neighbor says, "I really look up to you. Can you give me some spiritual advice?" We are happy to help and offer plenty of advice. It doesn't cost us anything and even makes us feel honored. Now imagine the same neighbor asking, "Can you help me move my refrigerator?" As much as we'd like to help, suddenly we're not sure if we have the time. Why is that? Why is it easier to give spiritual advice than to move a refrigerator? We feel good giving advice — but we don't get anything from lifting a refrigerator. Our spiritual work is to give the things we want for ourselves — our time, our energy, our attention, our money — to help our friends. Unless it is asked for, giving spiritual advice is suspect.

8) A technique for loving others is to connect to the aspect of God within others.

Our spiritual work is to strive to love others as much as we love ourselves. One way to help us do this is to remember that everyone is a divine soul — an aspect of God. Our bodies are temporary clothing that conceal our spiritual essence, which is glorious and eternal. We can try to recognize that the faults we see in others are just outer layers covering their divine essence. When we look beyond the outer form and focus on the divine essence of each person, our love for them naturally grows.

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When we do something wrong, we usually find plenty of reasons to excuse ourselves. This is because love covers all faults — and we naturally love ourselves. When other people do something wrong, do we look hard to find excuses for them? Loving others as much as we love ourselves means trying just as hard to judge them favorably.

The more we develop our love for others, the more we focus on their good points. And the more we focus on the good in others, the more our love grows. If we focus on people's faults, we find ourselves surrounded by lowly people. If we focus on the good in others, we are blessed to live among divine souls — each one reflecting the light of God.

9) When we are giving in divine service no being or situation in the world can cause us to feel limited. Therefore, the mindset of giving is called “freedom”.

Until we reach a high spiritual level, we are enslaved to our desire to receive. Our lives revolve around trying to do or get whatever we think will make us happy. Our minds are constantly calculating how to fulfill our desires, and we act according to those calculations. When we are enslaved to our desire to receive, there is always something we are trying to get — so we are in a state of servitude. Giving, on the other hand, is a state of freedom.

If we want to be in divine service this very moment, then no matter what the situation is, we can do that. Since every situation comes from God, we can always try to align ourselves with what we believe God would want us to do in it. Our work is to shift our consciousness from wanting

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to be served by God to wanting to serve God. When all we want to do is to be in service to God, we can be joyful in every situation, seeing each one as an opportunity to serve and to express our love for God. This is the high spiritual level of freedom.

10) We come to love only through giving.

It seems like it is the other way around — that when we love someone we give to them. Although that is true, the way we develop our love is through giving. The work of the heart is to give with the conscious intention of deepening our love. Through the spiritual work of giving, we increase our ability to truly love.



THE WORK OF THE MIND: EMUNA

The spiritual work of believing, called *emuna*, corresponds to the mind aspect of our desire to receive. This is the work of transcending our intellect. *Emuna* involves going along the path of Torah and the way of Chazal, the holy Sages, even when it is beyond our understanding.

The mind aspect of our desire to receive wants to understand. Divine reality, however, is far beyond what the mind can grasp. *Emuna* is spiritual awareness that transcends our limited understanding.

Our foremost teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu — Moses — is called in the Zohar *Raya Mehemna*, “The Shepherd of *Emuna*”. He is called this because he shepherds us along the path of *emuna*. This is the spiritual path of Judaism. The Torah and the Sages guide us to rise beyond the limits of our understanding through spiritual wisdom and practices that transcend the intellect. We develop our *emuna* by working with *emuna*.

Emuna is often translated as “belief” but it means something much deeper. It is a state of spiritual consciousness that transcends what we can understand. Although *emuna* goes beyond the intellect, it doesn’t disregard or belittle it. *Emuna* involves using our intellect to its fullest capacity — and then transcending it to reach a higher state of consciousness.

Emuna is an expression of both giving and love. It is giving because it involves giving up our natural desire to understand everything. It is love because the more we love, the more we have *emuna* — and the more we have *emuna*, the more we love.

The next section discusses 10 aspects of *emuna*.

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The spiritual work of *emuna* has many aspects:

1) *Emuna* that the way to connect with God is through giving and loving others

Even though our ego's desire to receive denies this, we need to have *emuna* that the way to connect with God is through giving and loving others. This *emuna* motivates us to root our lives in giving. Without giving and loving others it is not possible to come close to God.

Our spiritual work is to develop our giving and love. Since our desire to receive has no interest in giving or loving, it resists any real effort in that direction. One aspect of *emuna* is having *emuna* that our inner work is to develop our giving and love.

2) *Emuna* that God is guiding the world in absolute goodness

The spiritual work of *emuna* involves striving to realize that everything we experience is divinely orchestrated and coming from God's desire to bestow goodness.

The idea that God is guiding the world in goodness is beyond what our minds can comprehend. We experience suffering in our personal lives and see the great suffering throughout the world. However, as long as we are under the influence of our desire to receive, everything we see is an illusion. It is only when we are free from our desire to receive that we will

be able to see the true reality — that God is guiding the world in a way of absolute goodness.

The spiritual work of *emuna* involves striving to believe that everything is flowing from God's goodness, and striving to be joyful even when the goodness is hidden.

To the extent that we have *emuna* in God's giving and love, we also give and love.

The spiritual work of *emuna* is to strive to believe that everything that happens in our lives and everything that happens in the world is orchestrated by God. Everything is helping us become able to experience God's goodness. Having this *emuna* is not, as many people think, something we can simply decide to have. Developing *emuna* is a continual process of deep spiritual work.

The end of this section says: "To the extent that we have *emuna* in God's giving and love, we also give and love." This is powerful to contemplate.

3) *Emuna* that transcends the ego

Striving to attain *emuna* in God is motivated by one of two intentions: wanting to get or wanting to give.

Our desire for *emuna* can be completely self-serving, as having *emuna* makes us feel good. The desire for *emuna* can also be motivated by hoping

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to be rewarded by God, either in this life or the afterlife. When the desire for *emuna* is for self-serving reasons, the *emuna* is not actually focused on God, but rather on ourselves. The focus is on the gift and not on the giver of the gift.

The desire for *emuna* in its higher manifestation is rooted in wanting to act in a way that is appropriate to the gloriousness of God. The desire for *emuna* is motivated by wanting to be in a state of divine service — a state of giving. The focus is not on what we can get from God, but rather on attaining love for God. This is *emuna* that transcends the ego.

When we have *emuna* we are happy. Believing that we are in the presence of God and that everything we experience is bringing us toward boundless goodness is joyful. The deeper our *emuna*, the more joyful we become.

Although the source of reality wants us to experience this joy, if we strive for *emuna* only to make ourselves happy, it becomes self-serving. This type of *emuna* is motivated by our desire to receive. Striving for *emuna* out of a desire to give means we want to be in divine service — to deepen our *emuna* in God so that we can act accordingly. *Emuna* that is motivated by our wanting to give and love more deeply is *emuna* that transcends the ego.

The difference between *emuna* rooted in ego and *emuna* that transcends the ego can be understood by comparing the Torah verse *ein od milvado* with a spiritual concept called *izevel*.

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Ein od milvado means “There is nothing but God.” It expresses the *emuna* that everything happening comes from God’s goodness — that even the most difficult events of our lives are hidden blessings helping our souls develop. *Ein od milvado* represents the elevated spiritual consciousness of having *emuna* that everything is ultimately for the good.

Izevel is a spiritual concept that literally means “no garbage”. It expresses the *emuna* that everything we go through — even what seems bad to us — is leading us toward God’s goodness. It is *emuna* that even when it appears otherwise, everything is for the good.

Izevel seems to express the same *emuna* consciousness as *ein od milvado*. Yet *izevel* is considered a negative state of consciousness. This is surprising because *ein od milvado* represents a very high state of consciousness and *izevel* seems to convey the same idea. Why, then, is *izevel* considered negative?

This principle addresses that question. Although both express *emuna* in God’s goodness, the difference is in how we relate to that *emuna*. *Ein od milvado* represents using *emuna* to inspire us to deeper levels of divine service. *Izevel*, on the other hand, represents using the same *emuna* to release us from responsibility and the need to do anything.

Emuna rooted in ego serves our desire to receive, which doesn’t want to work on itself. It becomes an excuse to do nothing. *Emuna* that transcends the ego inspires us to action and higher levels of giving and love.

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As long as our desire for *emuna* is rooted in wanting to receive from the *emuna*, our ego does not intervene. The moment we begin to work towards attaining *emuna* with the intention of transcending our desire to receive, our ego interferes with all its might. The ego doesn't want to work without reward and it comes with its two main questions:

- 1) "How do you know there is God?" This question corresponds to the mind.
- 2) "What is the purpose of this spiritual work of giving?" This question corresponds to the heart.

If our striving for *emuna* is self serving, our desire to receive is engaged and even willing to work for it. The moment we strive for *emuna* in order to transcend our desire to receive and increase our giving, our desire to receive begins to resist. The more our self-interest feels threatened, the more it revolts. At that point, two main questions arise: "Why believe in God?" and "Why give?"

When these questions arise within us, it is a good sign. Our desire to receive is resisting because we are working on ourselves. If we are not working on ourselves, or our spiritual work is serving our desire to receive, these questions don't arise — our desire to receive has no reason to resist.

Our desire to receive has two aspects: heart and mind. There is a *tikun* — a spiritual fixing — for each. The *tikun* of the heart is to give, and the *tikun* of the mind is to believe. When we make an effort to give, our

desire to receive resists by asking, “Why give?” When we make an effort to believe, our desire to receive resists by asking, “Why believe?”

Although they are posed as intellectual questions, they are actually emotional ones. Trying to answer them intellectually only leads to more questions. The answer to “Why give?” is to give. The answer to “Why believe?” is to believe. Although it is not easy, struggling with giving and belief is how we develop spiritually. This is what our inner work is all about.

Emuna in God’s exaltedness is the key to transcending the ego. The more we have *emuna* in the exaltedness of God, the more we enjoy being in service without wanting any payment in return. When we serve that which is important, we are in a state of joy, and the more important something is the more joy there is in serving. Imagine, for example, the most important person in the world asking us for help. We would be happy to help any way we could and wouldn’t ask to be paid. The opportunity to serve someone extremely important is itself a reward. When we see how happy we are to be of service to a very important person, we can contemplate the magnificent joy we would experience in serving God if we had *emuna* in God’s exaltedness. Wanting to receive something from God would be irrelevant, as we would consider the opportunity to be in divine service the reward itself.

The desire to believe that we are in the presence of God in order to be in a state of giving and divine service is a desire for *emuna* that transcends the ego.

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A main aspect of spiritual work is striving to develop awareness of the exaltedness of God. As long as our conception of God remains small, our focus is on what we want God to do for us. The more we realize the exaltedness of God, the more our focus shifts toward wanting to serve God. This is because when something is very important, we enjoy being of service.

Imagine, for example, one of the most important people in the world asking us to help carry their briefcase. The opportunity to help someone so important would be a great pleasure. If that person offered us money for the help, we wouldn't take it. We might be willing to pay for the privilege of carrying the briefcase. This is because helping someone so important is a pleasure.

The more important someone is, the greater our joy in serving them. So imagine the boundless pleasure we would feel serving God if we realized God's infinite greatness. The reason we don't yet experience this is that we don't yet realize the exaltedness of God. Developing our *emuna* in God's exaltedness is a main aspect of our spiritual work. The more we develop this *emuna*, the more we enjoy being of service and giving.

The difference between *emuna* rooted in ego and *emuna* that transcends the ego is the focus of the *emuna*. When the focus of our *emuna* is self-serving, it is rooted in ego. When the focus is on increasing our giving and love for God, it transcends the ego.

4) *Emuna* that we are in the presence of God

An aspect of the spiritual work of *emuna* is striving to realize that we are every moment in the presence of God. This involves transcending what our mind comprehends. We can try to imagine how we would act if we experienced God, the source of all reality, in a revealed way. How would we feel? How would we speak? How would we think? The work is to train ourselves to be this way even when we do not feel the reality of God.

When we believe we are in the presence of God, whose glory fills the entire world, we are filled with love and awe and are in a state of nullification to God. When we have this *emuna*, we do not need to think about surrendering ourselves to God. It comes naturally. This is like when we have deep love for another person. We want to do good things for our beloved and want to keep away from whatever would not be good for our love. We don't need to intellectually figure anything out, rather our giving flows naturally like a mother's love for her child. When we love, we give from the depth of our soul.

Our *emuna* can reach a level where we feel constantly in the presence of God. We are then living in a state of love and awe. When the desire to have *emuna* that we are in God's presence permeates our entire being and becomes so precious to us that we feel that without it life is not worth living, our lives revolve around attaining *emuna*. Attaining *emuna* is what our lives are really all about.

Developing *emuna* that we are in the presence of God, and acting accordingly, is the essence of spiritual work.

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A main aspect of spiritual work is developing and strengthening our *emuna* that we are in the presence of God every moment. The more our *emuna* grows, the more we live accordingly. A main way we deepen our *emuna* is through learning the holy books of Kabbalah. Contemplating the teachings of those who have attained high spiritual awareness expands our consciousness and strengthens our *emuna*.

We also develop *emuna* by continually striving to realize that we are in the presence of God — the source of all reality. Although God's presence is mostly hidden from us, we can still strive to act, speak, and think as we would if God were revealed. This is deep spiritual work we can practice every moment.

Why is God's presence hidden from us? Because if the great pleasure of experiencing God were revealed before we were ready, we would experience it in a self-serving way. Working to develop *emuna* in God while God is hidden is preparing us to experience God in a more beautiful way.

5) *Emuna* that unifies the paradox between free will and divine providence

On the one hand, we have been given free will. On the other hand, everything in the world is being done by God. One aspect of *emuna* involves unifying the paradox between free will and divine providence.

Having *emuna* that unifies free will and divine providence entails focusing on our free will when there is something that needs to be done, and then after

the work has been done, recognizing the divine providence. Beforehand, the work is to believe that “If I don’t do it, it won’t be done.” Afterwards, the work is to believe that “Everything was done by God.”

There are those who say, “Everything is in our hands.” There are those who say, “God is doing everything.” It is much easier to go according to one of these two extremes than it is to go the middle way. For example, there are people who don’t go to a doctor when they are sick. They say, “Everything is from God. How can a doctor help? If God wants to heal me, God will heal me without a doctor.” There are also people who say the opposite, “If I don’t go to the doctor, I won’t be healed.” The way of *emuna* is to unify both of these. This means going to a doctor when necessary and then realizing, “It was not the doctor who healed me. It was God.” In a similar situation in the future, the way of *emuna* is to go again to the doctor, and know again that the healing didn’t come from the doctor but came from God.

The same is true with regard to working for a living. For example, there are people who say, “I don’t need to get a job. If God wants me to have a livelihood, God will send me money regardless of whether or not I work.” On the other hand, there are people who say the opposite, “If I don’t go to work, I won’t have a livelihood.” The way of *emuna* is to go to work, and then realize, “Even if I didn’t go to work and stayed home all day, if God wants me to have money, it will come anyway.” This way of *emuna* is beyond what our mind understands.

This work of *emuna* also applies to our spiritual practice. Before performing the spiritual practice of a *mitzvah* we are to have the perspective that it is up to us to do the work. Afterwards, we believe that God brought us close and that we did nothing on our own. Our ego, however, opposes this

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emuna from both directions. Before performing the spiritual practice of a *mitzvah*, our ego tries to keep us from working by saying, “There is no reason to exert effort on this. Everything is from God and there is nothing for me to do.” After overcoming that voice and performing a *mitzvah*, our ego then comes from the other direction saying, “It was all because of my effort that I succeeded.”

Emuna that unifies free will and divine providence is working with the perspective that, “Everything that happened until now was from God. From this moment on, I have the ability and responsibility to make the right decisions.” Going this middle way between free will and divine providence is an aspect of the spiritual work of *emuna* that is very difficult because it transcends what our mind understands.

On one hand, Kabbalah says we have free will — we make choices that truly affect what happens. On the other hand, Kabbalah also says everything that happens is from God. Every leaf falling from a tree falls exactly according to God’s plan. Even our thoughts are given to us by God! How can both free will and divine providence be true?

This paradox is beyond what our mind can comprehend. Although we can’t fully understand it, Kabbalah guides us in how to practically live with it. We live with awareness that everything that has happened up to this very moment happened for a divine reason. At the same time, we live with awareness that in this present moment, we are fully responsible for our actions and the decisions we make are shaping what happens next.

Everything in the past — including our mistakes — prepares us to

act in the highest way right now. The spiritual work is to live with the awareness that our actions have consequences and that everything we are able to do is in our hands to do — while also knowing that God is orchestrating everything.

The spiritual masters hold the paradox of free will and divine providence in a profound way. On the one hand, they are aware that everything comes from God. On the other hand, they do everything they can to better themselves and the world. We might think that people with awareness that everything comes from God would feel they don't need to do anything, but the spiritual masters of Judaism are the opposite.

The spiritual masters are constantly giving, striving to help others, and being of divine service. Many work so hard that they barely sleep. Awareness of God's providence doesn't diminish their motivation to give — it deepens it. They enjoy expressing their love. The spiritual masters exert themselves far beyond ordinary effort, yet at the same time, they know that everything is from God. This is remarkable. The more we progress spiritually, the more we can hold both extremes of this paradox.

Kabbalah explains that we are spiritually developing to experience God's boundless goodness. We have been given free will so that we can learn to truly love and experience the goodness in the ultimate way. Our free will is not just an illusion — it is real. If everything were predetermined and we were merely acting out a script, we wouldn't be developing genuine love. True love needs to come from ourselves.

Kabbalah explains that our ultimate state of experiencing God is determined, but how we get there depends on us. The choices we make

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bring about different future events — all divinely orchestrated to help us continue our spiritual development. We are destined to reach God's goodness, yet there are countless paths that lead us there.

Although this simple understanding helps settle our minds, the paradox of free will and divine providence runs even deeper. The Kabbalah masters say that we have free will — and yet, at the same time, everything is from God. The cosmic dance between free will and divine providence is beyond what our minds can understand.

One reason we can't comprehend this paradox is that our souls are currently clothed in time and space. This is so we can develop our giving and love. Eventually, we will transcend the dimensions of time and space and experience our spiritual reality — something beyond what we can grasp right now.

Although the paradox of free will and divine providence is beyond our comprehension, Kabbalah gives us a simple way to work with it: the past was from God, and the present is for us to do.

Awareness that the past was from God frees us from being continuously troubled by it — everything that happened was to help us grow spiritually. We can strive to relate to every situation in a positive way. Awareness that our choices have consequences, and that we are responsible for our actions, motivates us to do everything we can to improve ourselves and the world.

Kabbalah guides us to take full responsibility for what we can do and to constantly strive to do our best — while knowing that God's goodness is guiding everything. This is a beautiful way to live.

6) *Emuna* that our spiritual descents are given to us from God

One aspect of *emuna* involves believing that all our spiritual descents are given to us by God to help us progress spiritually. Our spiritual descents bring us awareness of what we need to work on within ourselves. The extent to which we become aware of our self-centeredness is the extent to which we can work to overcome it and strive to truly care for others. Feeling disconnected from God and disconnected from our spirituality enables us to desire a deeper connection.

As we progress spiritually, we are given deeper and deeper awareness of our desire to receive. This is in order for us to attain even higher levels of inner transformation. We are only given real awareness of our egoism to the extent that we are interested in transcending it and are able to withstand the awareness of how self-centered we actually are. The more our egoism becomes revealed to us, the more our prayer for inner transformation can come from the depths of our hearts. The deeper our prayer, the deeper the answer to our prayer can be.

Spiritual descents also give us the opportunity to work on ourselves when we are not feeling spiritual. Our spiritual practice is then free from being motivated by the good feeling we receive from it. If we want to work spiritually only when we have a spiritual feeling and there is a spiritual “atmosphere”, it is a sign that we are only serving ourselves. When we have a descent and the joy in Torah and in the spiritual practice of *mitzvot* is hidden from us, we then have the opportunity to be in divine service in a way that transcends our ego.

When we experience a spiritual descent, there are two ways we can respond: we can focus on the descent itself or we can focus on God who is giving us the descent. These two responses are completely opposite and as different

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from one another as night from day. This is because we are where our thoughts are. If we are thinking about our descent, then we are in a state of negativity, and in the state of negativity we do not experience blessing. On the other hand, if we are thinking about God who is giving us the descent, we are connecting with God. Connecting ourselves to God by contemplating God's goodness at the root of all reality, in and of itself, brings us out of the descent.

Experiencing spiritual descents is an essential aspect of spiritual development and is a sign that we are spiritually progressing. If we do not experience any descents in our spiritual practice, that is a sign we are not working on ourselves.

Emuna that our spiritual descents are given to us by God means appreciating our descents since they come from God to help us develop spiritually.

Spiritual descents are times when we feel spiritually disconnected and uninspired in our learning and practice. Although it is hard to appreciate these descents, they are essential for our spiritual growth. Spiritual development is not a straight path of ever-increasing ascent, but a continual process of ups and downs along the way.

Israel in Hebrew is *Yisrael*. One of the literal meanings is "Struggling with God". Struggling with our belief in God is how we grow spiritually.

We might think that a spiritual descent means falling from the spiritual path. Kabbalah, however, explains that a descent is actually the opposite of what it feels like. It is not our becoming distant from God, but God calling us closer. The descents we experience are opportunities to grow toward higher levels of belief, giving, and unconditional love. To

reach the next spiritual level, we need to let go of the level we are on. Although spiritual descents feel like regression, they are actually signs of progress.

We are learning to love. At first we may be able to love on a level of, let's say metaphorically, five kilos. Then we can learn to love on a level of ten kilos, then a hundred, and eventually a thousand. Ultimately, we can learn to love with our entire being.

At first, our awareness of our desire to receive and our self-centeredness is small — metaphorically on the level of five kilos. As our love deepens, it reveals our self-centeredness at higher levels — ten kilos, a hundred, a thousand, and so on. Higher levels of our self-centeredness are revealed because we become able to transcend them.

This is why, when we are progressing spiritually, it often feels like we are regressing. In the beginning, we feel that we have only five kilos of ego. As we progress, we feel our ego more strongly — eventually to the level of a thousand kilos. We feel more self-centered because we are being given stronger levels of our ego to work on. We have already learned to overcome the lower ones. Although it feels like spiritual regression, it is in fact spiritual progress.

Spiritual descents are important because they give us the opportunity to work on ourselves when we are not feeling spiritual. If we engage in spiritual practice only when we are in the mood, our practice remains centered on serving ourselves. Although spiritual practice does benefit us, its purpose is to develop our giving and love beyond ourselves.

Spiritual practice is a discipline that we learn to do regardless of how we feel at the moment. If we only practice when we feel like it, we are

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focused on getting. The purpose, however, is to develop our giving. If we give to someone we love only when we feel like it, our love is focused on ourselves. Love means giving even when we don't feel like it.

Although spirituality is connection to God and joy, our feelings of connection and joy are sometimes taken from us so that we can deepen our love and attain higher levels of connection and joy.

There are times in our spiritual practice when we feel joyful and connected to God, and times when we feel disconnected and find it a struggle to practice. We might think that the joyful moments are what truly matter in our spiritual practice, and that when we struggle, nothing is happening. In some ways, the opposite is true.

Joyful moments are precious, but they usually require little effort. In contrast, when we struggle, it demands a lot of effort, even when our practice feels far from ideal. This effort is precious because we grow spiritually in direct proportion to the effort we make. Although we don't naturally value our descents and the effort they require, these are the times when we transform the most.

What matters most in our spiritual development is not how spiritual we feel, but the effort we make. Our effort to connect to God during our descents brings us closer to God. One aspect of *emuna* is believing that our descents are given to us by God as opportunities to grow spiritually. With this *emuna*, our descents become ascents.

Earlier in the principle it says that we are where our thoughts are. What we are thinking about right now is where we spiritually are. This is such a deep idea.

In our present context, this teaching is brought in relation to how we experience spiritual descents. If we follow our natural tendency and focus on the descent itself — on our feeling of disconnection from God — we place ourselves in a state of negativity. The work is to shift our focus to the source of the descent. We want to realize that the descent is given by God to bring us closer. This thought connects us to God.

When we contemplate that the source of reality is constantly flowing boundless goodness and giving us this situation to bring us closer, we rise out of the descent. Thinking about our descents and thinking about where they come from are completely opposite ways of relating to them. When we have *emuna* that our descents are from God, even our feelings of disconnection from God become connections to God.

Our spiritual progression is not a simple ascent to higher and higher levels. There are ups and downs along the way. As we progress, we are given awareness of deeper levels of our self-centeredness and lack of belief in God. This awareness enables us to attain higher levels of giving, love, and belief in God. Feeling our disconnection from God is an essential part of coming close to God.

The spiritual path involves having *emuna* that all of our spiritual descents are from God.

7) *Emuna* that God hears our prayers

Emuna involves believing that God hears all our prayers. This means believing that God does not only hear prayers of the righteous, but that God also hears our prayers even when we are at our lowest. There is no such thing as being so lowly that God is not able to help. No matter where we have fallen, God can always raise us up. We express this *emuna* by never despairing, continuing in our spiritual work, and always having hope that God will help.

We learn in Kabbalah that we are praying every moment. Our prayer is not just what we say with our mouths — it is what we truly want. That is our real prayer. What we think will make us happy is what we are praying for.

We might pray with our lips for world peace or other noble causes, but if what would make us happy right now is someone walking in and handing us a million dollars, that is what we are praying for. We are always praying. Our wanting is our prayer.

Often, we relate to God as if we are making withdrawals from a bank machine — “God, please give this. God, please do that.” We pray for God to do for us. As we progress spiritually, we can shift the direction of our prayer. Instead of asking God to do for us, we can ask to be in service to God. Instead of praying to get, we can pray to give.

Although we are always praying through our desires, there is also great value in praying with words. *Hitbodedut* meditation — one of the deepest spiritual practices — involves setting aside a dedicated time

each day for a personal conversation with God. The great spiritual master Rebbe Nachman of Breslov taught that although it is ideal to speak with God all the time, it is good to set aside at least an hour a day to talk with God. Even five minutes a day is transformative and life-changing. The key is consistency. We find a quiet, private space, ideally in nature or anywhere we can be alone — and have a meeting with God.

During *hitbodedut* we speak with God as we would speak with a close friend. We can speak aloud or quietly, but central to this practice is that we talk to God in words. If we have nothing to say, we can express that — “I don’t know what to say right now” — and simply sit in the moment. The practice is to spend this dedicated time fully focused on God’s presence, striving to connect, and speaking from our heart. In this meditation we use words because articulating our thoughts and feelings helps clarify for ourselves what is happening inside us.

At first, *hitbodedut* can be very challenging, but with daily practice our words begin to flow and speaking with God becomes joyful. The time we set aside to speak with God can become the most precious moments of our day. When we first begin, we might not be sure God is listening. Over time, however, something extraordinary happens — we begin to experience God responding. This doesn’t mean hearing a literal voice, but rather sensing God communicating with us through the unfolding events of our lives. We start to recognize that everything that happens in our lives is God interacting with us. Speaking with God is one of the highest spiritual practices — it is truly life-changing.

One aspect of *emuna* is believing that God hears all of our prayers.

8) *Emuna* that there is nothing but God

Spiritual work involves striving to have *emuna* that the only reality is God.

Emuna that God is the only reality involves believing that God's desire to bestow goodness motivates everything in the world. This is living with awareness that everything that other people are doing is in essence being done by God. Our experiences of other people are experiences given to us by God. Our interactions with other people are actually interactions with the aspect of God within other people. We can work to attain this *emuna* and strive to act with this awareness. To the extent that we have this *emuna*, we relate to all other people as divine.

The spiritual work of *emuna* involves striving to live with constant awareness that the inner essence of everything in the world — mineral, plant, animal and human — is God.

There is Creator and creation. There is God, and there is us, who were created to experience God. The experience of God that we were created to enjoy is called "light". Our desire to receive, which can enjoy the light, is called "vessels". So there is light and vessels. There is nothing else.

The Baal HaSulam says to live with awareness that everything we experience is God. This means living with awareness that when someone speaks to us, it is in essence God speaking to us. Whatever someone does to us is God doing it to us. All our interactions with other people are really interactions with God. The more we develop spiritually, the more we realize that everything is from God and the more we see God in everyone.

We have free will and our decisions shape reality. At the same time, everything happening is divinely orchestrated to help us progress spiritually. The billions of decisions made every moment by people throughout the world all align perfectly with God's plan. This is completely beyond our comprehension. It is the paradox of free will and divine providence. We are making decisions, and at the same time, everything is from God.

Awareness that everything is from God doesn't mean passively accepting whatever happens. We are not meant to say, "If this is happening, God wants it to happen." Many things that happen are God telling us to change the situation. God's providence does not absolve us, or anyone else, of responsibility. We are fully responsible for our actions and their consequences. Our work is to do everything we can to better ourselves and the world, while at the same time having awareness that everything is from God.

Our natural tendency is to view external problems as the source of our troubles. We think everything will be fine once other people change. Kabbalah says the opposite. Outer reality is a reflection of what's going on inside of ourselves. Everything we perceive as wrong in the world mirrors something within ourselves that we need to address. We usually think the problem is other people, but the problem is actually within ourselves. Awareness of this is a cosmic shift of consciousness.

The Baal HaSulam gives the example of someone seeing a dirty face in the mirror and trying to clean the mirror. No matter how much we clean the mirror, it won't help. When we realize that everything we see as wrong in the world is pointing to something we need to fix in ourselves, everything that upsets us becomes a springboard for inner spiritual work.

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Imagine a teacher of martial arts placing obstacles in a student's path. The purpose of the obstacles is to help train the student. In the same way, everything that happens to us is meant to help us. Even the most difficult and painful situations we experience are perfectly designed and given to us by God to help us grow spiritually.

The essence of spiritual work is striving to realize that we are in the presence of God every moment. Our work is to try to see God in everyone and everything, and to live with awareness that everything is from God.

Rebbe Baruch Shalom Ashlag once said jokingly, "Our spiritual work is actually very easy. All we need to do is remember one thing and nothing more. What's the one thing we need to remember? — God!"

The Rebbe said this jokingly because remembering God is not easy at all. Our entire spiritual journey is about growing our awareness of God.

9) *Emuna* that God's exaltedness is so absolute that we are joyful for any minuscule connection we have to spirituality

We only need a small amount of something valuable to enjoy it. The less valuable something is, the more of it we need to derive benefit. For example, if we wanted to give someone a nice present, a diamond would be more than enough. If we were to give gold, which is less valuable, we would need to give a larger amount than the diamond. If we were to give iron, we would need to give quite a bit more. If we were to give gravel,

we would need to give tons. The more valuable something is, the more we appreciate even a small amount. The more our *emuna* in the exaltedness of God develops, the more we are able to appreciate and be joyful for any small aspect of spirituality that we are blessed with. As our *emuna* in the greatness of God increases, so too does our appreciation for the privilege of being given any connection to spirituality at all. We are joyful for any, even minuscule, connection to God that God gives us. Having a thought about God brings us deep joy when we contemplate the exaltedness of God giving us the thought.

God's exaltedness is so infinite that even the most minuscule connection with God is immeasurably precious. If a famous person we deeply admire gave us a moment of their time, we would treasure that moment. The more important the person, the more we would value it. Imagine how much we would value a single moment with God if we realized the exaltedness of God. Even a fleeting instant of contemplating God would fill us with profound joy. The more we contemplate God's exaltedness, the more we value every connection, no matter how small, that we are given.

Awareness of God's exaltedness doesn't come easily — it is cultivated over time through spiritual learning and practice. The more our awareness of God's exaltedness develops, the more we recognize that every thought we have of God is a gift from God and a treasure beyond measure. When we value what we are given, we are given even more.

10) *Emuna* that the way to connect to God is through *emuna*

Connection to God comes specifically through *emuna*. Living our lives with *emuna* means constantly striving to transcend our understanding.

Emuna is believing in God — believing that the source of reality is flowing boundless goodness, and that everything happening is preparing us to experience that goodness. Believing this is difficult. We experience a lot of suffering in our lives and see so much suffering in the world. Where is God? The spiritual masters explain that in order to experience God, we need to first learn to believe in God.

In Kabbalah, experiencing God and receiving God's love is called "direct light". Believing in God and giving love to God is called "returning light". A foundational principle of Kabbalah is that returning light is the vessel for direct light. This means that the more we give and love, the more we are able to experience God's giving and love.

We naturally prefer experiencing God to believing in God. We would much rather experience God's goodness than believe in it. Kabbalah explains, however, that believing in God is in some ways even more precious than experiencing God. Experiencing God is a state of receiving — we receive the pleasure of experiencing God. Believing in God is a state of giving and love — for love of God, we give up our need for God to be revealed.

This giving and love deepen our connection with God, which in turn enables us to experience God on an even deeper level. This is why the spiritual masters say that to experience God, we first need to learn to believe in God.

There are boundless levels of believing in God and of experiencing God. Every level of *emuna* we attain brings a corresponding level of experiencing God. Every level of experiencing God, in turn, inspires us to reach for even higher levels of *emuna*. This is how we progress — continually moving between believing in God and experiencing God on ever-deeper levels.

Developing *emuna* is challenging. If there were a way to experience God without the work of *emuna*, we would naturally choose that. Kabbalah, however, gives us a new perspective on *emuna* — one that, if we can appreciate it, is life changing. Kabbalah says that *emuna* is more than a means to an end — it is an ideal state of being.

Emuna is an expression of unconditional love to God. The more our awareness of God's exaltedness grows, the more we enjoy giving love to God. And the more we enjoy giving love to God, the more the opportunity to express that love becomes precious to us — we appreciate the hiddenness of God because it gives us the opportunity to express our love. This appreciation of *emuna*, toward which Kabbalah guides us, is a profound paradigm shift and one of the deepest secrets of life.

This spiritual insight is life changing. The more *emuna* becomes precious to us, the more we can value every situation we are in. We no longer suffer while waiting for God's goodness, but instead can appreciate every moment as an opportunity God is giving us to have unconditional love and to draw closer. There is no longer anything to wait for — every moment is an opportunity for *emuna*.

Developing appreciation for *emuna* is not easy. We will value *emuna* in God over experiencing God only when our love becomes so deep that

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giving is more precious to us than receiving. This is much harder than it sounds. It is the essence of our entire spiritual journey and what our lives are all about — developing our giving and love.

Kabbalah explains that the way to connect to God is through *emuna*. The more we realize the preciousness of *emuna*, the more we can shift from yearning for the revelation of God's goodness to yearning for *emuna*. Although we naturally long for external changes to make us happy, Kabbalah explains that the essential change is within ourselves.

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Emuna is a spiritual light and is the most valuable thing there is. It is the key to moving from selfishness to loving others, and the key to connection to God. It is the solution to everything that is broken in our lives. If we have *emuna*, we have everything. Attaining *emuna*, however, is not simple. We don't have *emuna* just by saying we have it. It takes a lot of hard work to develop it. I heard from my teacher, Rebbe Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag *ztz"l*, that we are not able to attain *emuna* through our own abilities. We need to make a lot of effort to think that everything is for the good, and act accordingly. In the end, however, only God can give us the ability to believe in God. Who does God give this light to? *Emuna* is given to a person who asks for it, and needs it, and wants to serve from love. Wanting to attain *emuna* precedes receiving the *emuna* from God.



Our main spiritual work is to reveal the aspects of giving and belief that are within ourselves, and to develop them.

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Emuna is belief in God — believing that the source of reality is bestowing boundless goodness to everyone.

There is nothing more valuable than *emuna*. A person may have billions of dollars, good health, a wonderful family, honor, and fame — yet without *emuna*, that person will not be truly happy. Life is uncertain, and the next moment could change everything. On the other hand, a person might be living on the street, without money, in poor health, and in a very difficult situation — but if that person has *emuna* that everything is from God and for the good, they can still be joyful. We see that *emuna* is more valuable than anything else. Even more importantly, *emuna* is more valuable than anything because it is the way we connect with God.

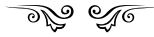
We might think that *emuna* is an intellectual decision — that we can simply choose to believe or not believe in God. But *emuna* is not something we can simply decide to have. *Emuna* is an exalted state of consciousness, developed through deep spiritual work.

We strive to develop our *emuna*, yet it does not arise from our efforts alone. In the end, *emuna* is a gift from God. This is wondrous to contemplate — our belief in God comes from God.

Principle 8 discusses the spiritual work of the heart and the mind — giving and believing. The essence of what we develop through our spiritual work is love.



PRINCIPLE 9 AWARENESS



When we want to connect to God and begin to work on ourselves spiritually in a real way, we begin to see how far we are from having *emuna* and truly giving. We become aware of our lack of belief in God and realize that we are not living with awareness that we are in the presence of God. We see that our ego completely refuses to humble itself to the reality of God. We also begin to see how far we are from truly loving others and become aware of how self-centered we actually are.

This principle is about developing awareness of our ego. Awareness of our self-centeredness and lack of belief in God enables us to work on transcending our self-centeredness and attain belief in God.

Working on ourselves spiritually “in a real way” means that our spiritual work is directed toward developing our giving and love. If we are not striving to develop our giving and love, our spiritual work is not truly spiritual. We are doing it to serve ourselves. This is spiritual materialism.

Real spiritual work means striving to develop the ability to love beyond ourselves. The more we strive to develop our love, the more we become aware of how much our love is still centered on ourselves. This awareness is essential. We can yearn to transcend our self-centeredness only to the extent that we become aware of it.

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The more we work to overcome our self-centeredness, the more we become aware of our desire to receive, and we come to realize the extent to which we are concerned only for ourselves. This awareness, although very painful, is extremely important. Awareness of our selfishness and the sorrow that realization brings are what allow for our inner transformation. Feeling our enslavement enables us to be redeemed.

If we think we already have deep love for others, we won't strive to love more deeply. If we think we already deeply believe in God, we won't strive for deeper belief. To truly love others and believe in God, we need to first become aware of our lack of love of others and lack of belief in God.

This principle is encoded in the teaching of the Sages that redemption did not come until Israel descended to the lowest level. This means that redemption comes only after we have become aware of the full extent of our selfishness and lack of belief in God. Then we can be redeemed. Awareness of our enslavement precedes our redemption. Awareness of our lack of *emuna* in God enables us to be given that *emuna*. Awareness of our self-centeredness enables us to be brought beyond it.

A central theme of the Torah is the nation of Israel being brought out of slavery and journeying to the Land of Israel. In spiritual terms, slavery represents being enslaved to our desire to receive — caring only for ourselves and being disconnected from God. The Land of Israel represents giving, unconditional love, and connection with God.

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The Torah's description of the nation of Israel being brought out of slavery and coming to the land of Israel also describes the spiritual development of all humanity — transcending the enslavement of the ego and attaining the higher consciousness of pure giving, unconditional love, and connection with God.

The Sages say that Israel was redeemed from slavery only after descending to the lowest level. This is generally understood to mean that we lost all connection to spirituality and were then redeemed. Kabbalah, however, explains this teaching of the Sages in the opposite way.

Kabbalah explains that through deep spiritual work we become aware of the real motivation for what we do. We come to see how much everything we do is to serve ourselves. We become aware of our lack of unconditional love and our lack of belief in God. It is through this awareness that we can be redeemed and given the ability to truly love and believe.

Israel's descent to the lowest level means that through deep spiritual work we became aware of our low state — and then we were redeemed. The Sages are teaching us that in order to come out of enslavement — we first need to realize that we are enslaved.

When we begin our involvement in spiritual practice, we expect to ascend higher and higher spiritually. The reality is the opposite. First, we need to go along the very difficult path of developing awareness of our desire to receive. Only afterwards are we able to come to our elevated state of true giving.

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As we grow spiritually, we develop awareness of how deeply everything we do is rooted in serving ourselves and how much we lack belief in God. This awareness is attained through inner work and is a sign of spiritual development. If we feel we are on a high spiritual level, it probably means we are not. If we feel we are lacking in spirituality, it is a sign we are progressing.

As we develop spiritually and become more aware of our self-centeredness, we experience opposite feelings:

- 1) It hurts to realize our selfishness.
- 2) We are happy to have been given awareness of what needs to be fixed in us.

These two opposite feelings are experienced one after the other. First, we feel the sorrow and pray from the depths of our hearts for an inner transformation. Although we need to feel the sorrow fully, we are not to remain in sorrow because sadness is a state of disconnection from God. After we have felt the sorrow, we then strive to be happy for having been given awareness of what needs to be fixed. That joyfulness reconnects us to God and then we can receive the answer to our prayers.

To truly love others and believe in God, we first have to become aware of our lack of love of others and lack of belief in God. In spiritual practice we try to give unconditionally and act as though we are in the presence of God. This develops our awareness of how difficult it is for us to give and how much we lack belief in God. This awareness brings two very different feelings. On the one hand, it feels bad to realize how much we are focused on ourselves and lack belief. On the other hand,

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we are happy because this awareness enables us to grow and come to truly love and believe.

We need to feel sorrow over our self-centeredness in order to be brought beyond it — but that sorrow is meant to be felt only for a limited time. We connect to God through joy, not through sorrow. Most of the day we should strive to be joyful. How can we be joyful when we realize our selfishness? We can be joyful for the awareness of what needs to be healed. How can we be joyful about our lack of belief in God? We can be joyful because this awareness enables us to be given belief in God. To the extent that we yearn to love and believe, we are given the ability to love and believe.

If our involvement in Torah and our spiritual practice of *mitzvot* are done in order to receive a reward, then our ego is fully engaged and we do not attain awareness of our self-centeredness and disconnection from God. If we are working in Torah and *mitzvot* to reach the state of *emuna* and pure giving, then our ego refuses to cooperate and we develop awareness of how much we are motivated by self-interest. The path to unconditional love and connection to God is through developing awareness of our self-centeredness and disconnection from God. Even though it hurts to discover the extent to which we care only about ourselves, we cannot develop spiritually without this awareness. The harder we work spiritually, the more our awareness increases. Although this is very difficult, this is the way we progress spiritually.

If our spiritual practice is focused on what we will get from it, our desire to receive is engaged. There is effort involved, but we are motivated by what we hope to gain. It is similar to exercising — we may not feel like

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doing it, but we push ourselves for the benefit of our health. As long as our desire to receive believes there is something worthwhile to gain from our spiritual practice, it is willing to invest in it.

If we are developing our belief in God because it brings us comfort, our desire to receive is engaged. But the moment we strive to develop belief in God so that we can act appropriately in God's presence and be more giving, our desire to receive is no longer interested.

Our desire to receive is interested only in receiving — not giving. The more we strive to deepen our giving, love, and belief in God, the more resistance we feel and the more aware we become of our lack of giving, love, and belief. This awareness is precious. We can transcend our ego only to the extent that we become aware of it.

Our spiritual work is not to nullify our desire to receive, but rather to transcend it. Every normal healthy person who is not an angel desires to receive pleasure in a self-serving manner. We are born with this desire and our desire to receive does not disappear. If our desire to receive were to disappear, we would be in need of a big doctor. The more we develop spiritually, the more we become aware of our desire to receive, and rather than overlooking it, we aspire to rise above it. As we attain higher spiritual levels, our desire to receive actually increases. The desire to receive remains, but we become able to transcend it. God becomes more important to us than our desire to receive.

Kabbalah explains that the source of reality is purely giving and has no need or desire to receive anything. Wanting to receive is a state of lack,

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and the source of reality lacks nothing. The desire to receive is what was created. It was created so that we can enjoy. Wanting to receive something is what enables us to enjoy it.

Everything in the world — minerals, plants, animals, and humans — are different levels of the desire to receive. Every movement reflects the desire to receive, and even minerals, which appear dormant, have constant inner motion. The desire to receive is the essence of creation — all of creation wants to enjoy.

We are in the process of developing our desire to receive to its highest state — receiving to give. Then we can enjoy God's goodness in the ultimate way. Rather than receiving God's gift in a self-serving way, we will receive it through giving and love.

Our desire to receive is not something we are trying to eliminate, but something we are learning to elevate. We are elevating it to its higher state of receiving to give. Our desire to receive is the vessel through which we experience God's goodness and is essential to who we are.

As we develop spiritually, our desire to receive increases. At first, we seek material pleasures, which are relatively small pleasures. Later, we become drawn to spiritual pleasures, which are far greater. Wanting these higher pleasures is a stronger desire to receive. As we progress, we become increasingly aware of spiritual pleasures that surpass anything we could have previously imagined. As our awareness expands, our desire to receive grows even more.

As we grow spiritually, our desire to receive is not nullified — it increases. Higher pleasures are revealed to us because we become able

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to receive them in a state of giving and love. Our love for God becomes more precious to us than our love for God's gifts. Likewise, our love for others becomes greater than our love for what they do for us.

We become aware of our desire to receive to the extent that we are trying to give. Awareness of our desire to receive is what enables us to be brought beyond it.

The more we engage in spiritual work and strive to give and love, the more we become aware of our lack of giving and love. The more we try to act as though we are in the presence of God, the more we realize our lack of belief in God. This awareness is precious. To the extent that we become aware of our self-centeredness, we can yearn to be brought beyond it — and be brought beyond it. To the extent that we become aware of our lack of belief in God, we can yearn for belief in God — and be given belief in God.



PRINCIPLE 10

SPIRITUAL TEACHER



When we become aware that our lives revolve around serving ourselves and we want to engage in the spiritual work of transcending this, we need to seek the guidance of a spiritual teacher.

Since every soul is unique, the right teacher will vary from person to person.

Ideally, a spiritual teacher is someone who has already attained the state of true giving and attachment to God. If we are unable to find someone on this level, then we need to seek out someone to learn from who is at least actively striving to overcome the ego and connect to God.

The Baal HaSulam attained *d'vekut* — union with God. Imagine what it would be like to learn from someone on that level. For his students, simply being in his presence was a spiritual experience. Most of us have not had the opportunity to learn from, or even meet someone on such a high level. While such a teacher is obviously ideal, we can appreciate what we have. It is important to seek out a spiritual teacher who is at least sincerely striving to develop their giving, love, and connection to God.

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One aspect of spiritual learning cannot be found in books. It is only learned experientially by being in the presence of a person who is attached to God. When we are sensitive to that person's high spiritual level, our souls are uplifted and inspired. We feel love and awe and our thoughts are directed to God. These feelings that are tangible in the presence of a person attached to God are very important for our spiritual development because they help us develop our love and awe for God. The elevated way that we act, speak, and think in the presence of a person attached to God inspires us to act, speak, and think in a way appropriate to being in the presence of God.

When a very important person enters the room, we naturally stand, pause what we are doing, and give them our full attention. We consider how to honor their presence. The greater the person's importance, the more we act accordingly.

Similarly, when we are in the presence of an exceptionally spiritual person, we are moved to act in an elevated way. We become mindful of every word we speak and even our thoughts are uplifted. Being in the presence of someone on a high spiritual level teaches us something that no book can convey. Our actions, speech, and thoughts are elevated and we tangibly experience ourselves spiritually uplifted.

Although we are uplifted in the presence of a very spiritual person, once we are no longer with them, we naturally relax and return to our usual patterns. Yet the experience we had reveals how we can strive to act, speak, and think at all times.

Even though we are not always in the presence of a highly spiritual person, we are always in the presence of God. The reason God's

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presence doesn't usually inspire us as strongly is because it is hidden from us. The presence of a spiritual person is more tangible. When we experience the elevated way we act, speak, and think in their presence, we can then strive to bring that elevated state into our daily lives.

When we are in the presence of someone attached to God, we desire to give and be of service. This is because we naturally enjoy being of service to someone extremely important. When serving someone very important we don't require payment for our service because the opportunity to serve is in and of itself rewarding. Although we naturally enjoy serving someone very important, it is more difficult to feel pleasure in serving God because God's importance and exaltedness are so hidden. The desire to serve that is tangible in the presence of a person on a high spiritual level helps us to develop our desire to be in service to God.

If an extremely important person were to ask us for a favor, it would be a great pleasure to help. We wouldn't ask to be paid. Simply having the opportunity to assist someone so important would be a pleasure itself — a pleasure we might even be willing to pay for. Serving someone of great importance is inherently pleasurable, and the greater their importance, the greater our joy in serving. Experiencing the joy of serving in the presence of a very spiritual person allows us to apply that joy in serving to other areas of our lives.

The more we become aware of the exaltedness of God, and realize that we are in God's presence, the more joy we have in serving God. As we attain higher consciousness and look beyond our physical bodies, we come to realize that every person is a divine soul of infinite importance

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and we enjoy doing for them. Being in the presence of someone on a high spiritual level helps us experience this in a tangible way.

Finding a spiritual teacher is not a simple matter. There are many so-called “spiritual” leaders, some with large followings, who are later found out to have done terrible things. Many spiritual teachers turn out to be anything but spiritual. There are also many well-meaning people who teach spirituality but don’t actually know much about it. They may know a lot of Torah, but have no idea what spiritual development is all about.

So how do we find a genuine teacher to learn from? It is not easy. Along with searching to the best of our ability, it is something to pray for. When we feel in need of a spiritual teacher and sincerely yearn for one, God willing, we will be given one.

Some people are blessed with a teacher who guides them throughout their entire lives. Most of us, however, need different teachers at different stages of our journey. We may need one teacher to prepare us for a deeper level of learning with another teacher for whom we are not yet ready. Whatever the case, finding our spiritual teacher is an essential part of our spiritual journey.

As long as we are under the influence of our desire to receive, our Torah learning is filtered through our desire to receive. It is therefore difficult to receive the light of transformation because we only take from the Torah that which is consistent with what our ego understands. A spiritual teacher can guide us in connecting to the true light of Torah that is beyond our ego’s understanding. A spiritual teacher is not someone we just learn information

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from, but someone who can guide us in the deep spiritual work of inner transformation — the transformation from desiring to receive to desiring to give.

Our desire to receive, our ego, constantly filters everything we learn through the lens of self-interest. A spiritual teacher helps us understand what we are learning in a way that transcends our ego's perspective.

The essence of our spiritual development is shifting our focus from trying to get to trying to give. This is the transformation. Although it is easy to speak about, it is the hardest thing to actually do. A spiritual teacher is someone who is actively working on this transformation and can help guide us through it.

Within the holy books of Torah is a spiritual light. Its purpose is to elevate us beyond our ego to a state of unconditional love. Torah is meant to bring us to union with our divine source. If we are only learning intellectual ideas from the holy books, we are missing the point. The purpose of learning Torah is to access the spiritual light of Torah — the light of transformation.

The purpose of learning Torah is to connect to the consciousness being passed down to us from the spiritual masters who wrote the holy books. Their high spiritual awareness is infused within their writings, and this is the essence of what they are transmitting to us. A spiritual teacher is not just someone who teaches Torah, but someone who helps us access the spiritual consciousness and connection to God that is the Torah.

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Kabbalah is called *Sod* — the secret of Torah. The secret of the Torah is what is hidden in the Torah. It is hidden there for us to search and discover it. Rebbe Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag says, “What is the secret of the Torah? — God!”

A spiritual teacher who has, through deep inner work, attained inner transformation and connection to God inspires us to work toward our own spiritual development. The love and respect we feel in the presence of our spiritual teacher helps us develop our love and respect for God. While it is ideal to seek out a spiritual teacher who has already attained *d'vekut*, we need to be happy with what we have. We want to learn Torah from someone who can guide us in our inner transformation towards unconditional love and pure giving. We want to learn from someone striving to overcome the ego, who does not want to receive honor — or anything else — from others, but rather wants to give to others. A spiritual teacher teaches about giving and *emuna*, and is also a living example of humility, loving-kindness and doing for others. Someone who is on the path of Torah and *mitzvot*, who aspires to attach to God, who knows how to properly teach the inner spiritual wisdom of Torah, who is working towards inner transformation, and who is constantly striving to nullify the ego to attain love for others and the desire to give — is someone we can learn from.

This principle emphasizes the importance of seeking a spiritual teacher. A spiritual teacher is not just someone who knows spiritual information. That we can get from a book. A spiritual teacher is someone with experience working on themselves spiritually. This is much harder to find.

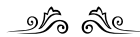
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If we want to become a doctor, we don't try to invent every medicine and technique from scratch. We learn from those who have practiced healing for many years. We learn from people with experience in what we want to master. The same applies to spirituality. We learn how to progress spiritually from people who have been working on themselves spiritually for a long time.

It is important to seek out a good teacher. We can't learn spirituality from someone who doesn't know anything about it. In the end, it doesn't matter how much Torah information or knowledge we accumulate. What matters is how much we work on ourselves to be giving, loving, and aware that we are in the presence of God.

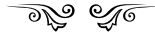
Our spiritual journey is the process of learning to give and truly love. The purpose of learning Torah is to develop our giving and love. Many people study only the outer aspect of Torah and don't know much about spiritual development. It is possible to know a great deal of Torah without knowing anything about our inner work. We can learn spirituality only from someone who has experience working on themselves spiritually.

Finding a true spiritual teacher is not easy — it is something we need to pray for.



PRINCIPLE 11

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONS



To reach the goal of loving everyone in the world as much as we love ourselves, we first need to be able to love our friends as much as we love ourselves.

Although we naturally love ourselves and focus on ourselves, our deepest nature — the divine aspect within us — loves beyond itself and seeks to give to others. Our lives are all about revealing the pure love that shines within us. The first step is learning to truly love our friends.

The first step is to form a small group of close friends who want to work together towards the goal of truly loving one another. It is important to choose friends we feel close with, and only people who are serious about doing this work. The group of friends meets regularly for spiritual learning and to discuss ways to develop love and cooperation between the friends.

While the goal is to reach the place of truly loving everyone in the world, at first the work toward loving others is focused primarily on this group of friends. We strive to focus on the good points of the other members of the group and try to think only good thoughts about each other. We strive to relax our ego and consider all the other friends extremely important people, more important than ourselves. We strive to be concerned with the needs of our friends to the same extent that we are concerned with our own needs.

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This principle emphasizes the importance of finding others with whom we can grow spiritually. We begin with a few friends and consciously work to develop our love for one another. Ultimately, the goal is to love everyone — but we don't love simply by saying we do. Love is expressed through our actions. Love means giving to others what we want for ourselves because of our love for them.

Although loving everyone is the goal, it is so difficult that it seems impossible. The first step is to strive to deepen our love for our close friends. Even this is not easy. The work is to try to love our friends as we love ourselves — just as we are naturally concerned about our own problems, we can strive to be just as concerned about theirs. To the extent that we love someone, we are troubled when they suffer and are happy when they are happy.

We begin by forming a small group of friends who share a desire to engage in this spiritual work together. Even two or three people are enough to start. The friends meet regularly — at least once a week is a good beginning. When we are together, we learn from holy books and speak about spiritual matters. The learning inspires us and guides us in deepening our love for one another and progressing spiritually.

We try to focus on each other's good points and to see our companions as the most important people in the world. We strive to raise our consciousness beyond the level of our bodies and focus on our souls. Although the goal is to relate this way with everyone, we begin by training ourselves with our spiritual companions. The love we are working to develop is not just an abstract feeling. Loving someone means that we do things for them.

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When a friend behaves in a way we don't like, the work is to judge our friend favorably — the same way we judge ourselves. Just as we find reasons to justify our behavior when we do something wrong, we need to do the same for our friends. The reason it is easy to judge ourselves favorably, and more difficult to do so with our friends, is that “love covers over all misdeeds”. Since we love ourselves, we naturally overlook what we do wrong. The difficulty in doing so with our friends comes from not yet loving them as much as ourselves. The work to develop our love for our friends is deep, practical, day-to-day spiritual work.

We often make mistakes, yet we have many excuses for our actions. When we see others doing something wrong, however, we usually don't consider the reasons they may have acted that way. We justify ourselves because of our love for ourselves. Since our love for others is not yet as deep, we don't automatically seek to understand or excuse their actions. Our spiritual work is to try to judge everyone favorably. We begin by focusing on our spiritual companions.

Developing love for our friends is a profound and practical aspect of daily spiritual work. Even if we meet with them only once a week, the spiritual work continues each day as we think about them and reflect on how we can help them. Just as we naturally think about what we can do for ourselves, we can strive to think the same way about our friends. This is the real spiritual work and this is how we develop our love.

When we succeed in loving our friends as ourselves, we can then try to widen the circle more and more until eventually we are able to love every single person in the world as ourselves.

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Around the world, groups of friends and communities are engaged in spiritual learning, striving to develop their love. As humanity evolves toward higher consciousness, more and more people will be drawn to join or form groups striving for spiritual development. The vision is for these circles to continue expanding until we reach the ultimate goal of truly loving one another.

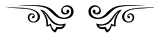
A major aspect of the spiritual work of “Love your friend as yourself” is the work between spouses to give selflessly to each other, fulfill each other’s needs, give each other deep respect, and truly love one another.

The spiritual work of marriage is for each person to shift their focus from what their spouse can do for them to what they can do for their spouse. This ongoing inner work between spouses is among the deepest spiritual practices.



PRINCIPLE 12

THE TWO WAYS



The divine plan ensures our spiritual development in two different ways: the way of Torah and the way of suffering.

The way of Torah is the way of conscious spiritual development — the path of spiritual work. This involves learning from holy books and connecting to very spiritual people. The holy books were passed down to us from people who attached themselves to God, and learning from these books awakens our souls and enlightens us. Through spiritual learning and by being in the presence of people attached to God, we become aware of the beauty of what we are working toward and are inspired to realize our true purpose.

Through spiritual learning and being in the presence of deeply spiritual people, we develop awareness of the divine goodness we are here to experience and learn how to grow spiritually.

When a person or society is not mature enough to be interested in holy books and spiritual teachers, suffering comes to show the worthlessness of materiality and the preciousness of spirituality. Rebbe Baruch Shalom *ztz"l* once explained this with a joke: There are two ways to catch a fish — you can take the fish from the water or you can take the water from the fish. To overcome our selfishness we need to pursue spirituality

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instead of material pleasures. If we don't strive for this, then the pleasure we get from material things is taken from us and the emptiness we feel leads us to look deeper.

If we are not working on ourselves to progress spiritually, the universe pushes us to progress. The suffering we experience in our lives comes to help us develop.

In the joke, the water represents self-serving pleasures. Our spiritual work is to rise beyond these and enjoy the more elevated pleasures of giving. If we are focused only on pleasures of receiving, our enjoyment of them is taken from us so that we will seek the deeper pleasures of giving.

Our souls exist beyond time and space, already experiencing God's boundless goodness — we are just not yet conscious of it. This is why the lower pleasures of receiving are never fully satisfying. Whatever we receive, the pleasure fades, leaving us wanting more. Life is designed to guide us toward the higher divine pleasures we are here to experience.

The ideal path is to consciously develop our ability to experience the higher pleasures. This path of developing our love through spiritual work is called Torah. If we don't strive to develop spiritually and only focus on self-serving pleasures, the emptiness we feel pushes us to develop our love and experience the higher pleasures.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

The Baal HaSulam writes in the book *Matan Torah*:

“Two forces motivate us to develop spiritually toward our purpose of attaining the state of pure giving and alignment with God. The difference between the two is that one of them we consciously choose and it draws us forward, while the other one pushes us forward without our choosing it.

The force that pushes us forward without our choosing it is called “the way of suffering” or “the way of nature”. The suffering we experience shows us the damage that egoism causes. To the extent that we see how bad our egoism is, we want to be rid of it, and we thereby progress spiritually.

The force that draws us to our purpose through conscious choice is called “the way of Torah and *mitzvot*”. Through the spiritual practice of *mitzvot* and striving to be in divine service, we become aware of what inside ourselves needs to be fixed. This way of Torah and *mitzvot* has two main advantages over the way of suffering:

1) In the way of suffering, life experiences push us forward, and we feel the pain and destruction that our egoism causes. In the way of Torah, we don’t need to wait for these experiences of suffering to push us forward. With spiritual work we reach the same awareness without having to go through the pain and suffering. The pleasure we feel when we are in service to God makes us realize the worthlessness of all self-serving pleasures. We become aware that these minuscule pleasures interfere with the ecstasy of divine service. Through the spiritual work of Torah and *mitzvot* we become progressively aware of what we need to fix in ourselves through the great pleasure and tranquility we feel when connecting with our divine Source.

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2) The other main advantage of the path of Torah over the path of suffering is that we spiritually develop more quickly. Since this is a path we consciously choose, it is in our hands to increase our spiritual practice of Torah and *mitzvot* as much as we want, in order to hasten our inner transformation.”

We are all destined to experience God’s gift of boundless goodness, but there are different ways of getting there. There are two general paths: the path of conscious spiritual development and the path of suffering.

The path of conscious spiritual development means actively working to develop our giving and love. This is the path of Torah. It enables us to experience God’s goodness in the ideal way. If we are not working to develop spiritually, the universe is designed to bring us there anyway. This is the path of suffering. Suffering means our desire to receive is not getting what it wants. This helps us to realize our need to change direction and progress spiritually.

If we are focused only on ourselves, we are never truly happy. We feel something is lacking and always want more. We are given this feeling to help us realize that the way we are living is not fulfilling. Our unhappiness is meant to inspire us to redirect our lives toward loving others.

This also applies on a larger scale. When humanity, as a whole, becomes consumed by self-interest, wars and destruction naturally follow. The immense suffering that results eventually compels us to recognize that we have gone in the wrong direction, and that we need to rebuild the world with love for one another. Consciously developing our love is the ideal path to God’s goodness. Suffering also brings us there, but in a far more difficult way.

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Everyone experiences suffering and wonders why. Although we all experience it, we can learn how to respond to it. Here are some insights about suffering:

1) The Baal HaSulam writes in his *Introduction to the Zohar*:

“All suffering is felt by our desire to receive for ourselves, which has only a temporary reality, since it was created to be transformed into the desire to give. The suffering that we experience reveals to us the worthlessness of the desire to receive for ourselves and the damage that it causes. Imagine what it will be like when all humanity unanimously agrees to nullify and do away with self-serving desires and everyone’s sole desire will be to give to others. All the worries and troubles of the world will vanish from the earth. We will all be able to live healthy fulfilled lives as each of us will have the rest of the world looking out for our needs. The worries, wars, bloodshed, and suffering that we find no escape from are all caused by our concern only for ourselves. This has also weakened our bodies with all types of pains and diseases. All the sufferings in the world are nothing other than revelations put in front of our eyes to motivate us to do away with our desire to receive and embrace the perfected state of desiring to give. As we discussed before, the way of suffering is able to lead us to our perfected state.”

Suffering pushes us to develop spiritually. When we realize that our desire to receive is never satisfied and is always suffering, we begin to yearn to rise above it. We were created to experience boundless joy, but to do so we need to attain the state of pure giving and unconditional love.

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2) The Baal HaSulam writes in *Perush HaSulam* on the Zohar:

“Our world was created to be in the ultimate state of divine joy. To experience the joy, however, we need to reach the state of complete unconditional love. Until then, we see a world full of suffering. It seems like the world has been given into the hands of the wicked and we feel physical and psychological pain. The world is this way when we oppose the inner nature of creation — the state of giving. We are born with a desire to receive only so that we can, through spiritual work, transcend it and attain the state of giving. Until we do so, we want to swallow up everything in the world for our own self-gratification.

The divine plan has arranged for us to be born with the desire to receive and to be given the spiritual work of Torah and *mitzvot* to purify ourselves in order to attain the state of giving. Involvement in Torah shines a light in our souls that enables us to feel the worthlessness of self-gratification and the destruction that it causes. Our hearts are awakened and we aspire to transcend our desire to receive and work towards attaining the state of true giving. When our inner transformation is complete, God opens our eyes and we find ourselves in a world that is completely good. We come to realize that nothing is lacking in the world and everywhere we look we see that everything is in a state of complete perfection.”

We are destined to attain the state of unconditional love and giving that will enable us to experience God's goodness in the ultimate way. There are two ways of getting there. When we strive to develop spiritually and grow our love for one another, we get there in a beautiful way. This is the path of Torah. If we neglect our spiritual development and

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don't care for one another, the universe has to drag us to the state of unconditional love that enables us to experience God's goodness. This is the path of suffering. It is a much more difficult way of getting to the same place. Although we are destined to get there, how we get there is up to us.

God's goodness is already here — it is waiting for us to attain the state of love that is able to experience it.

3) The Baal HaSulam writes in *Perush HaSulam* on the Zohar:

“We can attain a state of consciousness in which we realize that everything that God does is for the good. We come to see how all the suffering we went through as a result of our self-centeredness was necessary to enable us to become attached to God. We then bless all the suffering we went through because without it we would not have been able to get to the goodness. This is the spiritual level of realizing that the bad was in order for us to get to the good.”

All the spiritual masters tell us the same thing — that everything is for the good. They have reached the level of experiencing this. They perceive that everything that happens throughout existence is guided by a singular purpose — the bestowal of goodness. Even our sufferings are hidden blessings, helping us progress spiritually and become able to experience God's boundless goodness.

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From our perspective, this is incomprehensible — how can terrible suffering be part of God's goodness? The spiritual masters explain that God's goodness is intentionally hidden from us at first. They explain that when we complete our spiritual development and attain the state of pure giving and unconditional love, we will not only see that everything is flowing from God's goodness, but we will also see that the hiddenness of the goodness is part of the blessing.

Struggling to believe in God when the goodness is concealed is how we develop unconditional love that enables us to experience the goodness in the ultimate way. Struggling with belief is how we grow spiritually. One of the literal meanings of Israel is "struggling with God".

We can't yet understand how everything is for the good. Imagine someone watching a surgeon perform an operation without knowing what surgery is — they would think the surgeon is the most cruel person in the world, cutting someone open like that. When we understand what is really happening, we see that the surgery is an act of compassion — it is saving a life.

Right now, we see only a very small part of the vast process our souls are going through. The spiritual masters, who perceive the bigger picture, see that everything is for the good.

Kabbalah guides us to elevate the way we relate to suffering. We can see our suffering as random misfortune that is painful and has no purpose. Or we can recognize that, although painful, our suffering is a springboard to reach higher levels of spiritual development and closeness to God.

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The Kabbalah masters are not telling us to ignore or repress our pain. Rather, they explain that we can relate to it in a higher way. We can have awareness that our suffering is given to us from love as an opportunity to grow spiritually. Every difficulty we experience is a unique opportunity to develop our *emuna* and come closer to God.

“There is an even higher state of consciousness called *gam zu l'tova*, which means “this is also good”. This is the exalted spiritual awareness that not only did all our mistakes and suffering allow us to get to the good, but all the bad itself is transformed by God’s light to good.”

At first, the Baal HaSulam describes a high level of spiritual awareness in which we realize that all our suffering was for the good — that it brought us to goodness. Then, he describes an even higher state of awareness, in which the bad is not just something that led to the good, but is transformed by God’s light into good itself.

Wow! How can we understand this?

The Zohar describes a spiritual level in which the hiddenness of God’s goodness is no longer something we endure, but something we appreciate. We appreciate it because we want to love God unconditionally, and this becomes possible precisely within the hiddenness.

When God’s goodness is fully revealed, our love is naturally influenced by the goodness we receive. When God’s goodness is hidden, our love can be pure. Our love is not for the goodness we are given — our love is for God.

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When we reach the high spiritual level of wanting to give unconditional love to God, the hiddenness of God becomes precious to us. It is no longer an obstacle — it is what allows us to truly love. Every situation becomes a unique opportunity to express another facet of our love for God.

Our desire to receive is naturally in a state of lack — we wish that much of what happens in our lives were different, and we want many things that we don't have. Even when we get what we want, our desire to receive is never satisfied. The Sages say that a person who has 100 wants 200, and one who has 200 wants 400. We always want more. As long as we feel that our present situation is less than ideal, we are never completely happy.

If, however, we can appreciate every situation we are in as a unique opportunity to express our love for God, we can enjoy every moment. The lack we feel is what allows us to love unconditionally. The difficulties in our lives become paths of love and opportunities to come closer to God. We no longer need to get through the darkness to reach the light. The darkness itself is transformed into light.

The Zohar describes this as “the locks become the openings”. What we think is keeping us out is actually the way in. The locks don't need to open to go in — the locks themselves are the openings!

Kabbalah says that some souls, who have completed their spiritual development and are therefore able to receive God's goodness in a state of giving, choose to return to the hiddenness of God. Even though they are capable of experiencing God's boundless goodness, they choose for the goodness to be hidden once again. They enjoy the

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opportunity to express their love for God within the hiddenness even more than they enjoy the revelation of God's love. This is so profound to contemplate.

The idea that God's goodness being hidden could be preferable to its being revealed means that, if we were able to truly appreciate it, this very moment is the ultimate moment. The essential change that we need is not external — it is within ourselves. If we can appreciate the hiddenness as an opportunity to love, there is nothing to wait for. This very moment is a perfect moment to have unconditional love for God and to give. To the extent that we can internalize this, it is life-changing.

Although this spiritual consciousness is easy to talk about, it is not easy to attain. It is an extremely high spiritual level when giving love to God becomes more precious to us than receiving God's love. Even though most of us are still far from this level, we can bring this consciousness into our lives by striving to relate to our difficulties as opportunities to develop *emuna* and unconditional love.

The Baal HaSulam says that on the level of *Gam Zu LeTova*, the bad is transformed by God's light to good. I don't know how to understand this. Although it sounds like it could mean the locks becoming the openings — appreciating the hiddenness so deeply that it becomes good — I think *Gam Zu LeTova* describes an even higher spiritual state. It seems to describe a revelation of God so magnificent that we experience everything in a completely new light. There is no more hiddenness, and we see the bad itself transformed to good. How can the bad be transformed to good? I don't know. It is something to contemplate.

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The essential question is: how do we reach such high levels of love and spiritual consciousness? The answer is: through spiritual learning and spiritual practice — and God's help.

4) The Baal HaSulam writes in *Introduction to the Ten Sefirot*:

“Our disconnection from God, all the mistakes we stumble in, and all the pain and suffering that we go through have one single cause. If it were not for this one thing we would be instantaneously released from all our suffering and our hearts and souls would unite with God. The root cause is our lack of understanding the way God is acting with us — our not understanding divine providence.

Imagine for example that God guided the world in a revealed way, so that anyone who ate something unkosher would immediately choke, and anyone who performed the spiritual practice of a *mitzvah* would experience ecstasy and wondrous physical pleasure. Who would be foolish enough to even think about tasting something unkosher knowing it would end their life? The same way we wouldn't jump into a fire, we wouldn't consider tasting something forbidden. Likewise, who would neglect performing any *mitzvah*? We would run to perform *mitzvot* the same way we enthusiastically embrace any great physical pleasure that comes our way. If divine providence were revealed, everyone in the world would be completely righteous.

So we see that the only thing we lack is that divine providence be revealed.

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If this were revealed, then everyone would attach themselves fully to God with complete love every single moment. This is not the case, however, because the reward of the *mitzvot* and the consequence of doing bad are hidden. Why is this? Why do we need to go through this stage of hiddenness? Why isn't God revealed to us from the beginning? The reason is because this initial state of hiddenness is what enables us to experience God. The hiddenness brings us to the revelation. The role of the hiddenness is to cause us to wonder why we are not feeling God's goodness and motivate us to introspection. We then discover that the reason we are not experiencing God's goodness is because we are trying to serve ourselves rather than trying to be in divine service."

Mitzvot are the spiritual practices of Judaism. A single practice is called a *mitzvah*, and in plural they are called *mitzvot*. The practice of *mitzvot* will be discussed later in Principle 17.

In the passage above, the Baal HaSulam says that if every moment of loving and giving brought us ecstasy, and every moment of selfishness brought us suffering, we would all be completely righteous. Yet if this were the case, everything we did would be driven by self-interest. We would love and give only because it feels good. The boundless pleasure of being in divine service is temporarily hidden from us so that we can learn to truly love and give.

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5) As long as we are trying to gratify ourselves, we suffer. Even when we get what we want, we always want more. Living our lives trying to satisfy ourselves leaves us empty and unsatisfied. If, on the other hand, we live our lives focused on giving to others, our lives are satisfying and joyful.

Wanting to get is a state of lack. Giving is a state of abundance.

6) Our desire to receive is the cause of all the problems that we have with each other. We take advantage of one another because we are focused on ourselves and don't really care that much about others and their problems. All the oppression of humanity comes from people caring only about themselves. In the end, however, this comes back at us like a boomerang and brings great suffering. If we were, on the other hand, to root our lives in caring and doing for others, we would live prosperous lives in peace and tranquility. When we finally become concerned with each other's well-being, we will see the fulfillment of the Torah verse, "There will no longer be poor people in the land."

We were taught as children to share and not care only for ourselves. Kabbalah reveals that this is not just a nice idea, but the root of everything that happens in our lives. Learning to truly love is the journey of our souls.

We are in the process of transforming from wanting to get to wanting to give, and everything we experience is designed to help that transformation. When we work to develop, our reality shifts accordingly.

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When we remain rooted in self-interest and resist the transformation, the universe pushes us forward.

Kabbalah explains that this inner shift — from wanting to get to wanting to give — is the purpose of our present stage of reality. It is the solution to all the suffering in the world and the key to experiencing God's boundless goodness.

7) We experience true joy only through connection to God. As long as we are entrenched in our desire to receive, we are not able to connect to God because God has no desire to receive and only desires to give. Loving only ourselves disconnects us from God and therefore disconnects us from true happiness.

The more loving and giving we are, the more similar we are to God — and therefore the more we experience God.

8) The suffering we experience as a result of our desire to receive is intended to awaken us to the worthlessness of desiring to receive. The suffering brings us to realize that the most valuable things in life are giving and having love for others. When we realize this, we will do everything we can to attain true love for others and to be giving. Since God has the attribute of pure giving, when we attain pure giving, we attain union with God. We then experience true happiness. We also become able to receive all the divine goodness that was prepared for us, because we are able to enjoy the pleasure not for self-gratification but in a state of divine service.

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Everything happening in our lives is our divine, eternal, exalted souls learning to love.

9) Suffering continues until we realize that the most important things in life are believing rather than knowing, and giving rather than receiving.

Believing is an aspect of giving and love. We don't ask someone we love to explain why they do every single thing they do. The more we love someone, the more we believe in them even when we don't understand their actions. The more we love, the more we believe — and the more we believe, the more we love.

10) When we are not given happiness, it is so that we can attain true happiness. If we believe that all of our suffering is for our benefit, we can accept everything we go through with love.

This does not mean passively accepting our suffering. Suffering comes to encourage us to change our situation and remove the suffering. When there is suffering that we are not able to change, however, our relationship to it becomes essential. The more we develop *emuna* that everything we experience is ultimately for our benefit, the more we can accept what we are going through with love.

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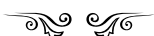
God and God's goodness are intentionally hidden from us. If this were not the case, and the divine goodness was revealed before we are ready, we would enjoy the pleasure egoistically, in a self-gratifying way disconnected from God. God's goodness being temporarily hidden from us gives us the opportunity to attain the state of giving.

The pleasure of experiencing God is so magnificent that if it were revealed to us before we were ready, we would experience it in a self-serving way. We can experience God's goodness in a far more beautiful way when we love God more than we love the pleasure of God's goodness — when God is more important to us than God's gift. Then we are not only receiving God's love — we are loving back. God's boundless goodness is hidden from us so that we can develop our love and become able to experience it in the most beautiful way.



PRINCIPLE 13

ASCENTS AND DESCENTS



If our spiritual work in Torah and *mitzvot* is to attain the state of *d'vekut* and pure giving, then our ego strongly resists and we experience ups and downs in our spiritual work. If our work in Torah and *mitzvot* is to receive a reward, whether in this world or the world to come, our ego is interested in the reward, so we don't experience ups and downs. Experiencing ascents and descents in our spiritual work is a good sign that we are working on ourselves spiritually. Not experiencing ups and downs is a sign we are not working.

Kabbalah guides us to appreciate our spiritual descents — the times we feel spiritually disconnected. Naturally, we don't value those times. We prefer feeling spiritually connected, uplifted and inspired. Kabbalah, however, explains that feeling disconnected is an essential part of our spiritual development. It is not hindering us — it is actually helping us progress.

The moment we begin trying to transcend our ego and develop our giving and love, resistance arises. As long as our spiritual practice is about gaining benefit, in this world or the world to come, our ego is engaged. The same is true when our practice is motivated by wanting to have spiritual experiences. Our desire to receive is willing to work for something valuable in return.

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The reason that anyone begins spiritual practice is to get something from it. There is no other way to start. We are naturally hardwired to want to receive. At first, we seek material pleasures — physical enjoyments, wealth, power, and honor. Intellectual pleasures are also in this category. Many people spend their entire lives pursuing only these pleasures. Some move on to seek the higher pleasures of spirituality. Until we reach the very high spiritual level of “giving to give”, everything we do is to get something — including our spiritual practice.

When we begin spiritual practice, we start to work with *emuna*, but our practice is still rooted in self-interest. We seek pleasures beyond the material ones in front of our eyes. We hope to gain benefit in this world or the world to come. At this stage, our desire to receive is engaged and motivated. This is the state of “giving to receive” discussed in the principle about the four stages, in its lower manifestation. We are giving — doing spiritual work — in order to get from it. Although our motivation is completely self-serving, this an essential stage of spiritual development and not to be belittled.

The next stage is when we want something more from our spiritual practice than personal benefit. We want to transcend our desire to receive and develop our desire to give and our love for God. At this stage, we still want to get something from our spiritual practice. What we want to get is the ability to develop our giving and love. This is the stage of “giving to receive” in its highest manifestation. We are giving — doing spiritual work. What we want to receive from it is — the desire to give.

This is when our desire to receive begins to resist. As long as our spiritual practice is about getting, our desire to receive is happy to participate, but when we become interested in giving, everything changes. Our

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desire to receive asks, "What will I get from the spiritual work?" And the answer is, "Nothing — I want to develop my desire to give." At that point, our desire to receive revolts. The deeper the spiritual work, the stronger the resistance.

When our desire to receive resists, we feel a spiritual descent. Spiritual practice becomes harder and we feel less spiritually inspired. This is actually a good sign — it means we are doing real spiritual work. If our spiritual practice always goes smoothly, with no resistance and no descents, it means we are not yet working on ourselves.

We might think that feeling spiritually down means we are not progressing. In truth, it is the opposite. Spiritual descents are signs that we are engaged in genuine spiritual work.

We might think that spiritual development is without descents and that we can just ascend to higher and higher spiritual levels. Spiritual development, however, is not like this. We spiritually progress through ascents and descents like the moon that waxes and wanes. Going through the darkness is how we come to the light.

When we are in a state of spiritual descent and feel spiritually uninspired, our work is to believe that this is for our own good. Descents are given to us from God to help us grow. All our spiritual progress is a result of our descents, because they keep us from being happy with our present spiritual state and inspire us to strive for more. Every descent gives us an opportunity to clarify aspects within ourselves that need fixing, and we can then pray from the depths of our heart for God's help.

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A spiritual level is a state of joy and thankfulness. We feel a connection with God and don't feel any lack. Although there are higher spiritual levels of even greater joy, gratitude, and connection with God, when we are filled with joy we feel no need to strive for more. Since God desires to give us even more, we are given a descent so that we can keep progressing. Our joy and sense of connection are temporarily taken from us so that we can strive to attain higher levels. The spiritual path is a continual progression of ascents and descents.

Although it is hard to appreciate the importance of our descents, during those times we feel in need of God's help, and are thereby connected to God. When we feel spiritually elevated, our need for God's help feels less urgent, and this lessens our connection. Descents are given to us to draw us closer. When we can experience a descent as given to us from God's love, then we ascend. This inner work of *emuna*, believing that our descents are from God, enables us to attain progressively higher spiritual states. Descents are only given to us if we are working on ourselves spiritually and only if we are capable of ascending.

Our descents are gifts from God to help us progress. This is easy to say but not easy to feel. When we experience a descent, it does not feel like a gift at all — we feel disconnected, uninspired and down. That is the very nature of a descent.

What we can do is try to relate to our descents in a positive way. Instead of allowing them to pull us further downward, we can use them to come closer to God. Every descent is a unique opportunity to develop our *emuna* and unconditional love. We can learn to appreciate our descents as moments for spiritual growth.

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The yearning to come out of a descent is itself a connection with God.

Someone came to the Seer of Lublin and said that he always experiences a spiritual descent when he is about to pray. The Seer of Lublin said, “I experience four hundred descents when I am about to pray.” Rebbe Baruch Shalom Ashlag explains, “Someone who has a descent is someone who previously had an ascent. A person who had four hundred descents is a person who also had four hundred ascents. This can only be with someone truly striving for *d’vekut* who is involved in deep introspection to refine even the person’s good deeds from any egoism and desire to receive.”

The Seer of Lublin is one of our great spiritual masters who lived about 250 years ago. The person coming for advice is saying: “When I try to connect to God, I feel so disconnected.” The Seer of Lublin is answering: “That’s great. Feeling our disconnection is how we attain a deeper connection.”

Every number in Torah and the writings of the Sages carries spiritual significance. The number four hundred represents the four letters of the divine name in their fullness — it symbolizes “the whole of something”. When the Torah says that Avraham purchased the Cave of Machpelah for four hundred shekels, it means a full price. When Esav comes toward Yakov with four hundred men, it means he is coming with all his strength. When the Seer of Lublin says he has “four hundred descents”, he is expressing that he feels completely disconnected from God. Feeling so disconnected is what enables him to be brought so close.

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The Baal HaSulam compared our ascents and descents to a nut on a bolt. The nut ascends and descends as it travels along but does not revolve repeatedly in the same place. With each rotation, the nut progresses towards the head of the bolt. We progress spiritually in a similar way. It seems to us that we keep falling and getting up in the same place — but it is not true. No two days are the same, every situation is unique, and every experience fixes something new.

The spiritual path is one of ups and downs the entire way. It sometimes feels like we are just going up and down in the same place without making any progress. In truth, every effort we make moves us forward and we are continually advancing. Our spiritual attainments are intentionally hidden from us so we can keep working on deeper levels. We don't yet see the full picture of how every moment of our lives is woven together for our spiritual development.

Spiritual practice can feel repetitive. We repeat the same prayers and perform the same rituals day after day. It may seem like we are just doing the same thing over and over. This is not the case, however, if we are doing inner work. The Holy Ari explains that no two days are the same, every situation is unique, and each moment of spiritual work accomplishes something new. Even when it feels as though we've fallen back to the same place, we haven't. Every moment, we are working on deeper levels.

The Rebbe of Kotzk said, "I stand with one leg in the seventh heaven and one leg in the lowest abyss." This statement describes people involved in spiritual work. When able to transcend the ego's desires and understandings, it is the seventh heaven. When the ego overcomes, it is the lowest abyss.

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The abyss means falling to the worst punishment of all — not believing in God.

The Rebbe of Kotzk is saying there are times he feels very close to God and times he feels completely disconnected. Ascents and descents come one after the other. Every feeling of disconnection enables us to reach a deeper level of connection. This is how we progress spiritually — through ascents and descents.

We can progress slowly or quickly. We may feel spiritually disconnected for an entire year before feeling connected again. Or we may feel disconnected one day and more connected the next. Ascents and descents can occur over hours, minutes, or even seconds. These ascents and descents are, metaphorically, “steps” of our spiritual progression — and we can influence how quickly we walk.

When we feel disconnected and remain in that state for a long time before taking the next step, we are progressing slowly. When we rise from our descents more quickly, we are developing at a faster pace. There are people on very high levels who are spiritually running. One moment they may feel heartbroken by all the pain and suffering in the world and feel disconnected from God, and the next moment be filled with great joy and deep *emuna* in God’s goodness. As we develop spiritually, our descents become deeper and our ascents become higher.

The meaning of “the worst punishment of all — not believing in God” is that when the joy of our connection with God disappears, it feels like a punishment. Actually, it is not a punishment at all — it is a blessing.

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Feeling our lack of belief in God is a prerequisite for attaining higher levels of belief in God.

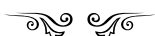
During the time of an ascent, it is important to contemplate how we felt and what we were thinking when we were down. This brings us to more fully appreciate our state of ascension. We make use of our descents during our ascensions. This is why we eat bitter herbs on the night of Passover when we are celebrating our freedom. We taste the bitterness specifically in the time of ascension to remember the bitterness — and to sweeten it.



We are given spiritual descents to help us grow spiritually.

The main concept in this principle about ascents and descents is that spiritual descents are an integral part of how we grow. We can learn to relate to our descents in a positive way and appreciate them as opportunities to reach deeper levels of connection with God. Our work is not to let our descents weigh us down, but to actively use them to progress spiritually.

PRINCIPLE 14 ENVIRONMENT



We are social creatures and are greatly influenced by society and our environment. The interests and desires of the people around us influence our own interests and desires in both conscious and unconscious ways. Therefore, to grow spiritually, it is very important to be in an environment that is conducive to spiritual development, and to be friends with people who are on the same spiritual path.

Our spiritual work to transcend self-centeredness and develop our inner divine aspect of unconditional love and pure giving is extremely difficult. Connecting with other people involved in this transformation is essential. When we are surrounded by people who are not striving to develop spiritually, but rather are interested in other things, then we are drawn after these other things ourselves. When we are among spiritual people who are striving through Torah and *mitzvot* to reach the state of pure giving and connection to God, then this is what we are drawn toward. Our inner spiritual essence needs fertile ground to develop, and our soul's potential to shine depends on our being in a good spiritual environment.

Our environment includes not only the people we are friends with, but also the books we read and the media that we are exposed to. Holy books are powerful because they connect us to the high consciousness of the people who wrote them and awaken our spiritual desires. On the other hand, exposure to egotistical thoughts and desires influences us in that direction. The same way that we need to be discerning about the food we eat for the

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sake of our physical health, we need to be even more discerning about what we read and watch for the sake of our spiritual health. Everything we expose ourselves to strongly influences us in ways beyond our control. The thoughts and desires that surround us influence our own thoughts and desires.

Our spirituality is determined by our environment. It is in our hands is to choose a good spiritual environment. We can choose to be around people who are not working on themselves spiritually, or we can choose to be around people whose lives revolve around striving to connect to God. To attain the state where our actions, speech, and thoughts are directed towards giving and divine service, we need to be around other people who are striving for this inner transformation. To progress spiritually we need to be around spiritual people.



To develop spiritually we need to choose a good spiritual community. Our spiritual development is determined by who we are friends with.

ENVIRONMENT

This principle says that our environment deeply influences our spiritual development. Among the most important decisions we make in our lives are where we live and with whom we spend our time. What the people around us think about, talk about, and give importance to greatly affects what we think about, talk about, and consider important. The environment we are in is a field of consciousness that surrounds us and influences us — both consciously and unconsciously.

Being around people interested in spirituality draws us in that direction. Being around people not interested in spirituality draws us in the opposite direction. To progress spiritually, it is important to be around others who are spiritually engaged.

It is ideal to live in a community of people who are actively striving to develop spiritually. If we are not living in such a community, it becomes important to seek out a spiritual sub-community. Meeting regularly with others who are engaged in spirituality creates a supportive environment within a broader society that may not yet share these values. This connects directly with the previous principle about the importance of spiritual companions.

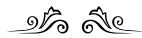
Our environment is not only the people around us — it includes everything we experience. The videos we watch, the books we read, and the media we consume affect us deeply, both consciously and unconsciously. The subject matter and desires expressed in whatever we expose ourselves to pull us in their direction. If we want to be physically healthy, it is important to eat healthy food. For spiritual health, what we consume is even more important. Because we are so

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deeply influenced by everything we take in, it is essential that what we watch and read is spiritually healthy. This requires a lot of effort and discipline.

One way we improve our environment is by learning from holy books. When we learn from holy books, we are spending time with the spiritual masters who wrote them. They enlighten us and guide us. We can strive to connect not only to their wisdom, but also to the elevated consciousness that flows through them. Consistently learning from holy books is essential for spiritual development.

To develop unconditional love and connect with God, it is important to be in a good spiritual environment. Our environment includes the people we spend time with, the books we read, and the media we watch and listen to. Improving our environment is one of the main ways we progress spiritually.



PRINCIPLE 15
KAV EMTZAAE

Our inner work is divided into two general aspects called *kav yamin*, right consciousness, and *kav smol*, left consciousness.

Right consciousness is a state of mind focusing on the good, on what we have to be thankful for, and on the greatness of God. The more we live with this consciousness, the more joyful we are. In this state of mind we are not focused on the gift, meaning how much connection to God we have been given, but rather are focused on the greatness of the giver of the gift. Contemplating the wondrous exaltedness of God, we are happy with any spiritual connection we have been given, no matter how small. Right consciousness is a state of gratitude and appreciation. Most of our spiritual work involves trying to be in this state of right consciousness called *kav yamin*.

In the state of *kav yamin*, we do not contemplate what we need to fix within ourselves, but only focus on the greatness of God. For example: We are busy with material matters and don't think about God the entire day. Suddenly, we remember God. If we focus on the greatness of God and the perfection of God's providence, and realize that every one of our thoughts is sent to us directly from God, we are immediately thankful that God has given us a thought about God. There is, however, another possibility. Instead of being happy about God awakening us and drawing us closer, we could be downhearted that we went so long without thinking about God. This reaction has no place in *kav yamin*. In right consciousness the work is

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to transcend our negative feelings and to appreciate and be happy for any small spiritual connection we have, including even a thought about God. The majority of our spiritual work is to strive to be happy in the presence of God.

The other main aspect of inner work is called *kav smol*, left consciousness. *Kav smol* involves introspection, self-reflection, and examining what needs to be fixed within. We contemplate our progress in spiritual development and reflect on whether or not we really have *emuna* and love for God. We look to see if our love for others is developing and consider how much we actually do for our friends. Although the work of *kav smol*, left consciousness, is very important and necessary for our spiritual development, we are to spend only a short time each day doing this work.

Most of the time our work is to be in *kav yamin*, right consciousness. We set aside a short time each day to be in *kav smol*, left consciousness. It is important to work with each state of mind independently and not to mix them up. When in *kav yamin* we are not to think any thoughts of *kav smol*. When *kav smol* thoughts come we put them off until the specific time that we have previously designated for the work of *kav smol*.

Working with these two states of mind purifies us to be able to experience the *Shechina*, the divine presence. Our Sages say, “the *Shechina* dwells between *yamin* and *smol*,” meaning we experience the divine presence between right consciousness and left consciousness. Working with these two states of mind is how we progress spiritually.

Why do we need to work with both right and left? Working only with the self-criticism of the left brings sadness and depression and can also be immobilizing. Although we need the work of the left to continue to develop

and become able to receive the goodness that God desires to give us, we can't live only with negativity. With the work of the right we experience God's blessing. On the other hand, if we work only with the right, we are satisfied with our spiritual state and don't aspire to progress. The world is not rectified by the happiness of *kav yamin* alone, or by *kav smol*'s focus on what is lacking. To progress spiritually, we need to work with both right and left aspects of consciousness.

Working with *kav yamin* elevates *kav smol*, and working with *kav smol* elevates *kav yamin*. Working in right consciousness, we contemplate the exaltedness of God. When we then shift to left consciousness and are self-critical, the measure of our right consciousness awareness of God's exaltedness is our measure of awareness that our behavior is not yet appropriate to God's greatness. Our work in right consciousness elevates our state of left consciousness. On the other hand, the extent of inner brokenness that we feel in left consciousness necessitates the measure of *emuna* in the goodness of God that we need from right consciousness. As the measure of our left consciousness grows, the measure of our right consciousness grows as well. When we are involved in the spiritual work of *kav yamin* and *kav smol*, the two states of mind enhance each other.

Working with *kav yamin* and *kav smol* appropriately is called *kav emtzaee*, the middle way. This is how we progress spiritually. In contrast, spiritual practice done without working with *kav yamin* and *kav smol* is called *kav echad*, one line. This means observing rituals but not being involved in introspection and the spiritual work to transform from receiving to giving. If our spiritual practice is done in that way, we feel that the rituals we perform are favors we are doing for God. We feel deserving of a reward for everything we do and feel that God is in debt to us. We feel big and see God as small. If we are working with *kav yamin* and *kav smol*, it is the

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opposite. With the work of *kav smol* we feel ourselves small, and with the work of *kav yamin* we feel the exaltedness of God. When we feel God as big and ourselves as small, we are not asking what God can do for us, but rather are joyful to have the merit of being in service to God.

Kav emtzaee is central to the method of Kabbalah and an essential dimension of spiritual work.

There are two basic states of consciousness: *kav yamin* and *kav smol* — right and left consciousness. These do not refer to physical directions, but to two opposite mindsets. When we feel good, we are in *kav yamin*. When we feel bad, we are in *kav smol*. *Kav yamin* is appreciation and focusing on what is good. *Kav smol* is criticism and focusing on what is lacking. When we are in *kav yamin* we enjoy giving. When we are in *kav smol* we want to get. Working with *kav yamin* and *kav smol* in a healthy, properly balanced way is *kav emtzaee* — center consciousness.

Although there are many levels of *kav yamin* and *kav smol*, we are always in one or the other. We either feel appreciative and happy, or we don't. Our natural tendency is to be in *kav smol* most of the time and in *kav yamin* only occasionally. Our spiritual work is to reverse this — to be in *kav yamin* most of the time and in *kav smol* only occasionally.

Although our natural tendency is to be in *kav smol*, our innermost self is always in a state of pure happiness that is not dependent on anything external. Part of the work of *kav yamin* is developing awareness of our divine essence that is always joyful.

Before we begin the work of *kav emtzaee*, the events of our lives and our emotional states usually determine which *kav* we are in. When things are

going well and we are in a good mood, we are in *kav yamin*. When things are not going the way we want and we are in a bad mood, we shift into *kav smol*. We move back and forth between right and left consciousness like a person riding a horse that goes wherever it wants.

The principle of *kav emtzae* says that we don't have to be passive riders. We can learn to take the reins and consciously steer toward the state we want to be in. Learning to guide ourselves between *kav yamin* and *kav smol* is key to spiritual development.

The first step is becoming aware of which *kav* we are in. We can begin to notice our shifts between *kav yamin* and *kav smol* and observe how they affect all of our interactions with others. We can develop awareness of *yamin* and *smol* in everything we do, say, and even think:

Are my actions right now *yamin* or *smol*?
Are the words I am saying *yamin* or *smol*?
Are my thoughts in this moment *yamin* or *smol*?

We can even bring this awareness into our prayers, examining whether they are *kav yamin* or *kav smol*.

The first step is learning to recognize which *kav* we are in.

There is always something we can be grateful for and always something we can complain about. So every moment of our lives we have a choice — what to focus on. We can focus on what we lack or on what we have to be thankful for. We can focus on what we want to get or on what we can give. Continuously striving to be in *kav yamin* is a central aspect of spiritual work. When things are going our way and we are happy, *kav yamin* comes naturally. When we are going through difficult times and

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are unhappy, it requires great effort. In those moments, the work is to strive to have *emuna* in God's goodness and to contemplate what we have to be thankful for.

We don't appreciate much of what we have because we rarely think about it. Take breathing as an example. Every breath is a gift, yet we usually take it for granted. If it suddenly became difficult to breathe, and then we were able to breathe again, we would deeply enjoy every breath. However, we don't need to wait for things to be taken from us in order to enjoy them. If we become conscious of our breathing right now, and contemplate that each breath is a gift from God, we can enjoy breathing this very moment.

By contemplating what we have to be grateful for, we can deeply enjoy so much in our lives that we normally overlook. A central aspect of our inner work is focusing on what we have to be thankful for. The more we are thankful, the more joyful we become, the more joy we spread to others, and the more we connect with God. When it is difficult to be in *kav yamin*, we can ask God for help.

Although most of our work is to be in *kav yamin*, *kav smol* also plays a crucial role. To fix what is broken, we first need to recognize the brokenness. When the time for *kav smol* comes, we review our past day and critically examine our actions and motivations. We contemplate our shortcomings and reflect on how we can improve ourselves and the world. When we were in *kav yamin* we tried to be joyful, focusing only on the good. Now, in *kav smol*, we look deeply at what needs fixing and consider what we can do to make things better.

We contemplate our selfishness and yearn to transcend it. We contemplate our lack of belief in God and yearn for *emuna*. Although

revealing our shortcomings is painful, we need to recognize them in order to fix them. We can learn to appreciate the awareness of what needs fixing within us, because it is how we grow. The awareness itself is a gift from God to bring us closer.

Although going deeply into *kav smol* is important, the time for it needs to be short and predetermined. If we don't set a specific time for *kav smol* it constantly arises in an unhelpful way and brings us down. We are not meant to walk around all day thinking, "I'm so selfish". We connect with God through joyfulness, not through feeling bad about ourselves.

Kav smol is essential for our spiritual development and helps us reach higher levels of *kav yamin* — but only when used properly. By setting a designated time for *kav smol* we can use it constructively. Then, when it appears throughout the day, we can say, "Not now — we'll meet later at the set time." Once we have a set time for *kav smol*, we can strive to be in *kav yamin* throughout the day and have a healthy response to the constant intrusions of *kav smol*.

We give *kav smol* its time, and when that time is over, we transition back to *kav yamin* — being thankful, joyful, and focused on the good. When we work with deeper levels of *kav smol*, we need to draw on higher levels of *emuna* to shift back into *kav yamin*. The greater our *emuna*, the higher the level of *kav yamin* we reach. As we progress spiritually and become able to work with deeper levels of *kav smol*, we draw on even higher levels of *emuna* and experience progressively higher levels of *kav yamin*.

The way we work with *kav yamin* and *kav smol* is one of the core expressions of *kav emtzaee*. However, *kav emtzaee* has many other dimensions as well. One of them is the spiritual work of integrating

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opposites. The spiritual path requires us to work with contradictions and to live with paradoxes that go beyond what the mind can grasp. Our efforts to integrate body and soul, physical and spiritual, receiving and giving, understanding and *emuna*, free will and divine providence — all of these are expressions of the work of *kav emtzaee*. When dealing with opposites, it is often easier to fall into one extreme or the other. Our spiritual work is to find the healthy balance.

The end of the principle of *kav emtzaee* explains how it applies to spiritual practice itself. In this context, *kav emtzaee* means that our spiritual practice is focused on becoming aware of our self-centeredness and striving to transcend it. This involves working with both *kav yamin* and *kav smol* — being joyful in our practice while also honestly examining our self-serving intentions.

Spiritual practice that does not include sincere contemplation of our ego-driven motivations, and does not actively seek to rise above them, is called *kav echad* — one line. Although people practicing this way may not realize it, this kind of practice is driven by the desire to receive personal benefit. It looks spiritual on the outside, but in truth it is spiritual materialism.

A person can perform religious rituals and give to others all day long, but that doesn't mean it is done out of love for God or love for others. A waiter serves people all day, but not out of love — the waiter serves because they are being paid. If they weren't being paid, they wouldn't be serving. Spiritual practice done only for reward is no different. Spiritual practice that is done only to receive personal benefit is not truly spiritual. Real spiritual practice is about developing our giving and love — this is the work of *kav emtzaee*.

What is the difference between materiality and spirituality? Materiality is focused on receiving. Spirituality is focused on giving. This is a powerful definition. It means that something that looks spiritual might actually be material — and something that looks material might actually be spiritual. For example, someone could be meditating for three days straight, which appears to be a highly spiritual act, but if they're doing it only to "get the light", then by this definition it is a material act. On the other hand, someone could be eating a meal — which seems like a material activity — but if they are doing it to bring joy to the person who prepared it or to gain strength to do good in the world, then that act is spiritual. Spirituality is determined not only by our actions, but by the intentions behind them. Spiritual practice is spiritual only to the extent that it is done with the intention of developing higher levels of giving and love.

What is written here about *kav emtzaee* is only a very basic introduction to this principle. There is so much more to *kav emtzaee*, explored in great depth across thousands of pages in the holy books of Kabbalah. The central works of Kabbalah — the Zohar, and the Etz Chaim of the Ari HaKadosh — revolve around the concept of *kav emtzaee*. It is at the heart of the spiritual path of Judaism. Although there is so much more to this principle, what is discussed here presents an essential aspect of *kav emtzaee* that offers practical guidance for working with what is happening within us, moment by moment, on the spiritual path. Striving to live mostly in the joyfulness of *kav yamin*, while setting aside focused time for the introspection of *kav smol*, is one of the core teachings of the method of Kabbalah.



PRINCIPLE 16

INNER TORAH



We can learn Torah from two different perspectives:

- 1) The Torah is outside of ourselves.
- 2) The Torah is inside of ourselves.

The Torah is generally learned from the perspective of being outside of ourselves. For example, the Torah's discussion of Yakov and Esav is understood to be speaking about two different people. The Torah's description of Israel's enslavement in Egypt is understood as referring to two different nations. Although most of the world learns Torah this way, many difficulties arise from this way of learning. One difficulty is that it can seem like the Torah is only a record of historical events and stories, God forbid. Also, when we learn Torah this way it is hard to feel a direct connection between what is written in the Torah and our personal lives.

The holy Zohar explains that every single word of the Torah contains divine secrets and guidance on how we can attain *d'vekut*, connection with God. The Zohar explains that the Torah is not only outside ourselves but also inside of us. For example, Yakov and Esav are two aspects of our inner self struggling for control. Avraham, Yitzchak, Yakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah represent levels of consciousness that we can attain. Israel is an aspect of ourselves becoming free from the slavery of another aspect of ourselves called Egypt. When we relate to the Torah as describing aspects

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of our inner selves, we are not learning about events that we can feel disconnected from — every letter of the Torah is relevant to each of us personally. This is the way to relate to the Torah.



Also foundational to understanding the Torah and the words of the Sages is understanding that everything described in the Torah about God is actually speaking from the perspective of our experience of God.



The entire Torah is describing inner psychological states and levels of consciousness that we experience along the path of spiritual development. The Torah is describing what is happening within us, and explaining how we can personally attain *d'vekut*, union with God.



Every word of the Torah is a divine name that in essence describes a particular measure of experiencing God.

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Kabbalah explains that the meaning of Torah is far beyond its surface reading. The Torah is not merely a history book or a scroll of ancient stories, as some people assume, but a gateway to higher consciousness. What appear to be stories are actually coded expressions of exalted spiritual wisdom. The Zohar explains that from the first letter to the last, the Torah is one long divine name, describing the process of spiritual development that enables us to experience the source of reality. Every word of the Torah is guiding us to make contact with God.

The Torah describes the journey of our souls. The days of creation, the Garden of Eden, the flood, Noah's ark, going into slavery, being brought out of slavery, the splitting of the sea, traveling in the desert, coming to the Land of Israel — and everything else in the Torah — all represent states of consciousness. From beginning to end, the Torah is describing our spiritual journey and guiding us along the way.

Kabbalah explains that the Torah's descriptions of past events also describe what is happening right now. The stories, adventures, struggles, and relationships in the Torah all depict inner processes and the dynamics of our soul. Conversations between people in the Torah reflect conversations that take place within us. The Torah's description of the nation of Israel being brought out of slavery and coming to the land of Israel describes the journey of all humanity transcending the self-centeredness that enslaves us and learning to truly love. The inner meaning of every verse in the Torah is about developing our giving, love, and connection with God. Within every word of Torah is deep spiritual wisdom and spiritual light guiding us to higher consciousness.

We can look at the Torah's description of Noah's ark as an example. In Hebrew, the word for "ark" is *teivah* which also means "word". The

Torah describes the ark's dimensions as 30 by 300 by 50. In gematria, Hebrew numerology, these values correspond to the letters *lamed* (30), *shin* (300), and *nun* (50) that together spell *lashon*, meaning "language". So in addition to meaning "ark", *teivah* also means "word" and "language". The Baal Shem Tov explains that the verses about Noah's ark contain profound insight into the nature of prayer.

The *teivah*, the "ark", represents our words of prayer — our yearning and effort to connect with God. The flood symbolizes our being overwhelmed by the troubles of the world and by our lack of belief in God. The animals each represent different aspects of our inner selves. The three levels of the ark correspond to three realms of consciousness — *Briya*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiya* — and to three realms of our spiritual work: thought, speech, and action.

The Zohar explains that the Hebrew word for "ark", *teivah*, is a coded expression for the spiritual process of returning light. Direct light is experiencing God's love. Returning light is returning love to God. A foundational principle of Kabbalah is that returning light is the vessel for direct light. This means that we experience God's giving and love to the extent that we give and love. The Torah's description of Noah entering the ark is giving us deep insight into the spiritual ascent that comes from shifting our focus from receiving to giving.

This does not even scratch the surface of the spiritual wisdom hidden within the story of Noah's ark. Here we are not learning the inner meaning of these verses — only noticing how the Torah is far more than it appears. What seems like a story about animals on a boat is actually describing profound spiritual concepts. The Torah is not meant to be read only as something that happened long ago, but is meant to be

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read primarily in the present tense. It is describing what is going on within ourselves right now.

When we begin to look into the depths of Torah, we see that a simplistic reading is only the outer garment of Torah. The meaning is so much deeper. Encoded within every verse is exalted spiritual wisdom, guidance, and divine light.

As another example, we can consider Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If we read these verses of Torah simplistically, we imagine two people in a beautiful garden with a talking snake enticing them to eat fruit from a forbidden tree. Kabbalah explains that Adam and Eve are not merely two people in a garden, but represent our universal soul that exists beyond time and space. The Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden is the ultimate experience of God that we were created to enjoy. The snake represents our desire to receive, enticing us to take the divine pleasure before we are ready to experience it in the more elevated way of giving and love.

This does not begin to express what the Torah is conveying through the story of Adam and Eve, but is meant only to show that the Torah is far more than it appears. A very holy section of the Zohar, *Tikunei HaZohar*, discusses seventy dimensions and meanings of just the first word of the Torah, *Beresheet*.

The Zohar says that relating to the stories of the Torah only simplistically is a disgrace to the Torah and causes great spiritual damage. It is a misunderstanding of what the Torah truly is. The words of Torah mean far more than their surface meaning — they express exalted spiritual wisdom and are channels of connection to God.

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The main meaning of Torah is its inner spiritual meaning — but is the simple meaning of the Torah also true?

The Sages make a distinction between the *mitzvot*, the spiritual practices described in the Torah, and the other portions of the Torah. Concerning the *mitzvot*, the Sages say, *ein mikra yotze midei peshuto* — “A verse does not depart from its simple meaning.” This means that while the *mitzvot* contain extremely deep inner meaning, they are not only spiritual concepts. They are meant to be practiced literally.

With regard to other portions of Torah, we need to learn how the Sages explain them. Most verses — in addition to their inner meaning — are also true in their simple meaning. Taking some other verses simplistically would be a misunderstanding.

For example, there are verses in the Torah that describe God as being angry or jealous. These are not meant to be understood simplistically. God never gets angry — the source of reality is always bestowing unconditional love. God never gets jealous — who could the source of reality be jealous of? Such passages do not mean that God has these human emotions. How could we even imagine such a thing? The Torah is guiding us to connect with our divine source of pure love — not anger or jealousy. Kabbalah reveals that verses like these are written in coded spiritual language and are not meant to be taken simplistically. Understanding many verses of the Torah simplistically would be a great misunderstanding.

Kabbalah helps us access the deeper meaning of Torah and experience its spiritual light. The more we look up to the Torah and revere the exalted spiritual wisdom within it, the more the light of Torah shines

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within us. If we don't realize how spiritual the Torah is and look down on it, the spiritual light doesn't shine for us and we can't benefit from it. Someone who doesn't revere the spirituality of the Torah and studies it only academically doesn't receive spiritual benefit from it. We can only learn from the Torah if we realize that we have something to learn from it. The more we revere the Torah and look up to the divine wisdom it contains, the more we open ourselves to its spiritual light.

The same is true regarding reverence for Chazal — the Sages. The spiritual masters we learn from attained exalted spiritual levels. To the extent that we revere their spirituality, we benefit from learning their holy writings. If we don't recognize how spiritual they are and imagine that we are more developed than they are, we have nothing to learn from them. This is why when we open a holy book to learn from it, it is valuable to take a few moments to contemplate the high spiritual level of its author. The more awareness we have of their holiness, the more receptive we become to the elevated consciousness they are transmitting.

The Zohar says that the essence of Torah is clothed in its stories like wine in a jug. The purpose of the jug is to hold the wine. Some people see only the outer garment of the Torah and are unaware of the preciousness within. Some people merit to look beneath the garment and behold the beautiful body of the Torah. The spiritual masters have merited to go even deeper and experience the soul of the Torah. Ultimately, there is an even higher level — the soul of the soul of the Torah. Hidden within all the words of Torah and the spiritual wisdom they contain is a secret waiting to be revealed. The secret is — God!

THE TREE OF LIFE

The key that unlocks the inner meaning of the Torah is the Tree of Life.

Each of the four letters of the divine name ה - ו - ה - י expresses a spiritual realm and a stage of spiritual development. In greater detail, these realms unfold into ten states of consciousness known as the ten *sefirot*, or the Tree of Life. The spiritual wisdom of the Tree of Life is the heart of Kabbalah.

Kabbalah discusses the Tree of Life from “above to below” and from “below to above”.

From “above to below”, the Tree of Life expresses the process through which the boundless goodness flowing from the source of reality is gradually concealed. This concealment enables us to learn how to experience the goodness in the ultimate way — through giving and love.

Holy books of Kabbalah — tens of thousands of pages of spiritual wisdom — describe the realms of spiritual consciousness expressed in the Tree of Life from “above to below”. One of the most essential is Etz Chaim, which records the teachings of the holy spiritual master, the Ari. This wondrous wisdom gives us profound insight into the spiritual structure of reality.

Learning the Tree of Life from “above to below” is the more technical aspect of Kabbalah — the spiritual mechanics of how the system of divine realms unfolds.

From “below to above”, the Tree of Life expresses the inner work of

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developing our giving and love, and the stages of spiritual ascent. Here the focus is on our personal spiritual development. Tens of thousands of pages of holy writings explore this aspect of Kabbalah, known as *avodat HaShem* — spiritual work. The most essential book of Kabbalah, the Zohar, contains wondrous spiritual wisdom that guides us in ascending the Tree of Life from “below to above”.

These central books of Kabbalah — the Zohar and Etz Chaim — are written in a coded spiritual language. Like the Torah, they use terms and imagery from our material world to express spiritual concepts that transcend materiality. Even when one understands this coded language, the profound wisdom within these holy books remains extremely complex and challenging to grasp. Without knowing the coded language, they are impossible to understand. Until relatively recently, only people on a high spiritual level were able to have any real understanding of the Zohar and Etz Chaim.

This changed about 300 years ago when the great spiritual master, the Baal Shem Tov, began teaching Kabbalah publicly in a way that made it far more accessible. Many of his disciples — and the disciples of his disciples — became great spiritual leaders themselves, each transmitting the spiritual wisdom in their own unique style. This outpouring of Kabbalah grew into the revolutionary spiritual movement known as Chasidism.

Today, the revelation of Kabbalah has expanded even further. The Baal HaSulam — one of the great spiritual masters of modern times — wrote profound commentaries on both the Zohar and Etz Chaim, unlocking their coded language and guiding us in how to understand them. Through these epic commentaries, we can now access the

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Kabbalah directly from the Zohar and the holy books of the Ari. This is revolutionary. Wisdom of Kabbalah that was once understood only by great spiritual masters has now become accessible to all humanity.

Kabbalah explains that the Tree of Life is a spiritual blueprint of reality — a kind of spiritual DNA of life. Every aspect of existence, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, is structured according to this divine pattern. The ten *sefirot* of the Tree of Life describe the spiritual roots of everything: the parts of our bodies, aspects of our personalities, colors, sounds, musical notes, the laws of nature and science, the nations of the world, relationships, social dynamics, ecology, economics, politics, creativity — absolutely everything. Every dimension of our reality reflects another expression of the same spiritual design. This is wondrous to contemplate. Ultimately, the Tree of Life reveals the spiritual structure of the universe, the evolution of consciousness, and the journey of our souls — showing how everything in existence participates in this divine process.

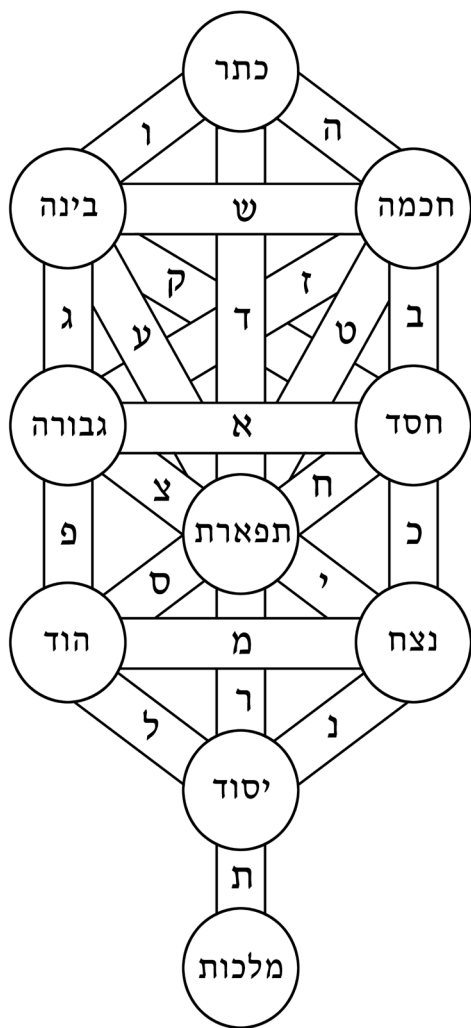
The Tree of Life is also the key that unlocks the inner meaning of the Torah. Every person in the Torah corresponds to a particular *sefira* of the Tree of Life, and every *sefira* corresponds to a specific aspect of our inner self. Once we know which *sefira* each person in the Torah represents, and what aspect of our inner self that *sefira* reflects, we can begin to access the inner spiritual meaning of the Torah. We then begin to see how the interactions between people in the Torah describe our inner conversations and states of consciousness, guiding us in our spiritual work. The Tree of Life reveals that the Torah is far more than a record of past events — it is describing what is happening within ourselves right now.

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On the following page is a traditional diagram of the Tree of Life. The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are unique channels of spiritual energy that connect the ten *sefirot*.

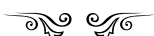
The ten *sefirot* are depicted in three columns, reflecting what was discussed in the previous principle of *kav emtzaee*. The right column represents *kav yamin*, the left column represents *kav smol*, and the center column represents *kav emtzaee*. Within every *sefirah* of the Tree of Life are all ten *sefirot*, and this fractal pattern of consciousness continues endlessly in every detail of reality.

Although diagrams are sometimes used when learning about the Tree of Life, it is very important to remember that the Tree of Life is nothing like any diagram. It is realms of consciousness — not anything material. Tens of thousands of pages of spiritual wisdom explore the Tree of Life, and it is far more complex and abstract than anything a diagram can express. Diagrams can be helpful for understanding specific concepts and relationships between *sefirot*, but we need to always remember that the Tree of Life describes states of spiritual consciousness. The Tree of Life is not meant to be pictured — it is meant to be experienced.



PRINCIPLE 17

TORAH AND MITZVOT



We attain the inner transformation from desiring to receive to desiring to give through Torah and *mitzvot* — spiritual learning and spiritual practice. Learning Torah illuminates our spiritual path and enlightens us. Each of the 613 *mitzvot*, the spiritual practices of the Torah, has a spiritual root in one of 613 aspects of our soul and is a unique conduit for connecting to God.

Spiritual practice, for those on the path of inner work, is not about getting a reward but rather about attaining the desire to give. The goal is to be in divine service. The motivation for this comes from *emuna* in the greatness of God. When learning Torah or performing any spiritual practice, it is important to contemplate what we want to attain from it. Ideally, we want to attain *emuna* in God's exaltedness, goodness, love, and presence in every moment of our lives. Our spiritual work in Torah and *mitzvot* can be focused on one point: asking God for *emuna*. When we attain even the most minimal level of *emuna* in God, we are already living in a different reality.

If our involvement in Torah and *mitzvot* is rooted in wanting to receive a reward, whether in this world or the world to come, then our spiritual practice is motivated by our desire to receive. If we are not after a reward, but are striving to be in divine service, our ego does not cooperate and we begin to discover how far we are from having real *emuna* in God and how far we are from truly loving others. The more intensely we engage in this

spiritual work, the more our ego and the extent of our self-centeredness becomes revealed to us. This awareness of our desire to receive and our disconnection from God, which we attain through deep spiritual practice, although painful, is most precious — it enables us to receive our inner transformation from God and be brought close.

The spiritual pleasure contained within every one of the *mitzvot* is greater than all the physical pleasures of the world combined. This pleasure is hidden from us, however, and to perform *mitzvot* we need to work with *emuna*. Why is this? Why is the pleasure inherent in physical matters revealed, for example the pleasure of a good meal, while the pleasure in *mitzvot* is concealed? The hiddenness of the pleasure of a *mitzvah* makes it possible for us to perform it in order to give, in a state of divine service. If the spiritual pleasure contained in a *mitzvah* were revealed to us, we wouldn't be able to determine if we were performing it in divine service or to experience the pleasure and thereby be serving ourselves. Once we have reached the spiritual level of being able to perform *mitzvot* in the state of divine service, the spiritual pleasure hidden in them can be revealed to us. Then we reach a deeper level of clarifying our intention — determining whether even after the pleasure becomes revealed to us, we can still prefer the state of *emuna* over the state of revelation.

Learning Torah and practicing *mitzvot* with the intention of attaining the state of pure giving and unconditional love is the process through which we attain the state of pure giving and unconditional love. It is essential for our Torah learning to focus on the inner spiritual wisdom of Torah — Kabbalah. Through the spiritual work of *mitzvot*, we gain awareness of what our ego wants to do and what it doesn't want to do. Attaining this awareness and working with the *mitzvot* to transcend our desire to receive is essential for our inner transformation and reaching *d'vekut*, attachment to God.

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We develop awareness that we are in the presence of God by learning the inner spiritual wisdom of Torah and through the spiritual practice of *mitzvot*. Developing *emuna* that we are in the presence of God, and acting accordingly, is the essence of spiritual work.



Spiritual work done with happiness and an uplifted spirit brings a corresponding level of enlightenment in Torah and experience of God.



The essential question is: “How do we actually do it? How do we spiritually progress?” The answer is: “Torah and *mitzvot* — spiritual learning and spiritual practice.”

Torah — Spiritual Learning

Torah means learning the spiritual wisdom passed on to us by the spiritual masters. Learning from these holy people awakens our souls, inspires us toward our higher purpose, and guides us along the spiritual path. Torah learning is not merely the study of information — it is connecting with the spiritual light of Torah. The more we seek God within the Torah, the more transformative our Torah learning becomes.

Two main categories of Torah are *halacha* and *kavana* — action and intention. *Halacha* is the details of how to perform the *mitzvot*. *Kavana* is our inner spiritual work — intention, consciousness, spiritual development and connection with God. This is the focus of Kabbalah.

Halacha is our outer spiritual work and is the body of Torah.
Kabbalah is our inner spiritual work and is the soul of Torah.

It is important for our spiritual development to learn both *halacha* and Kabbalah. *Halacha* guides us in how to externally perform the *mitzvot*. Kabbalah guides us in how to internally perform them and develop our giving, love, and connection with God. Whatever amount of time we dedicate to learning Torah, it is important to spend most of that time learning about our inner spiritual work. Although it is important to learn both the body and soul aspects of Torah, the soul aspect is the most important — the body exists to serve the soul.

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Many people mistakenly think that Kabbalah should be learned only after reaching a certain age and after mastering many other aspects of Torah. This is not true. This widespread misunderstanding is tragic because it disconnects many people from the spirituality of Judaism. There are no prerequisites for learning Kabbalah. The moment we become interested in our spirituality is the moment to begin to learn about it. Of course it is essential to learn from authentic Kabbalah books and we need to start at the beginning. It is also important to find a good spiritual teacher from whom we can learn and receive guidance.

People who say that we must first have a strong background in other areas of Torah before learning Kabbalah are mistaken — and most likely do not know much about Kabbalah themselves. Kabbalah discusses the meaning of life and explains what spiritual learning and practice are truly about. It is the essence of Torah. Once we begin learning Kabbalah, we see that it is key to understanding Torah itself. Without it, Torah learning and practice of *mitzvot* can easily remain self-serving without us even realizing it. Kabbalah shows us how to engage with Torah and *mitzvot* in the right way — to develop our giving, love, and connection with God. Although every part of Torah is important, especially for our generation, Kabbalah is the most essential.

Torah learning is a spiritual discipline and it is important to set fixed times for it. It is ideal to be engaged in spiritual learning every day — even if only for a short time. We have an ancient tradition to begin the day with spiritual learning and prayers, ideally learning before dawn and then praying at sunrise.

Shabbat is a very special time for learning Torah. The joy of Shabbat opens realms of consciousness that are beyond what we experience

during the week. Although Shabbat and early morning are special times to learn, it is wonderful to learn Torah anytime.

Torah is best learned together with spiritual companions and under the guidance of a spiritual teacher. Whether we are learning with others or on our own, it is important to maintain a steady discipline of spiritual learning. Learning Torah spiritually inspires us and guides us along the way.

Mitzvot — Spiritual Practice

Mitzvot are the spiritual practices of Judaism. There are 613 practices — 248 of action and 365 of restraint. The *mitzvot* of action are pathways to higher consciousness that develop our giving and unconditional love. The *mitzvot* of restraint develop our ability to overcome receiving that is only self-serving. Each of the 613 *mitzvot* corresponds to a unique aspect of our body and soul.

Kabbalah explains that everything in our physical reality reflects our spiritual reality. So, our physical body mirrors our spiritual body. What is our spiritual body? It is our desire to receive, which was created to enjoy God's goodness. In its perfected state, our desire to receive is in order to give — experiencing God's goodness in a state of giving and love. Elevating our desire to receive to this state of giving is the essence of spiritual development.

Our physical body can be understood as having 613 parts, each one reflecting an aspect of our spiritual body — our desire to receive God's goodness. Each of the 613 *mitzvot* is designed to elevate one aspect

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of our desire to receive to its higher state of giving. Each part of our body — and its corresponding aspect of our desire to receive — is like a spiritual acupuncture point elevated through its *mitzvah*.

Although there is much to learn about the meaning of every *mitzvah*, to actually perform one we need to go beyond what we understand. This involves working with *emuna*. It is not easy because we naturally want to understand what we are doing before we agree to do it. The practice of *mitzvot*, however, works the other way around — the Torah asks us to act before we fully understand. Since our ego resists this, the practice of *mitzvot* involves striving to transcend our ego.

The reason we want to understand the *mitzvot* before doing them is that, deep down, we want to know what we are going to get from them. Torah guides us in the opposite direction — to give from love. By practicing *mitzvot* beyond the understanding of our ego, we learn to transcend our ego. We learn to work with *emuna* and develop our giving and love. The practice of *mitzvot* is how we train ourselves to live in divine service and unconditional love.

Although what spiritually happens when we perform a *mitzvah* is hidden from us, Kabbalah explains that it is wondrous beyond anything we can imagine. The spiritual light and blessing that flow through the *mitzvot* is purposely concealed so that we can perform them out of love rather than for our own benefit.

If we practice *mitzvot* in a low consciousness way only to serve ourselves — to be rewarded in this world or the world to come — then our desire to receive is engaged, and we feel no need for God's help. If, however, our intention is to be in divine service and develop our giving

and love, then our desire to receive resists. It doesn't want to do the work. Although this resistance is difficult, it is actually a good sign — it means we are working on ourselves.

The resistance connects us with God because we feel our need for God's help to perform the *mitzvot*. We need God to give us *emuna* in God's exaltedness so that we can serve with joy. The deeper we strive to practice *mitzvot* purely out of love, the more *emuna* in God's exaltedness we need — and therefore receive. If we practice *mitzvot* only to serve ourselves, we have no need for the *emuna*, and so it is not given.

The Zohar explains that the *mitzvot* have two aspects, called *itin* and *pekudin*. *Itin* means “advices” and *pekudin* means “treasures”. At first, the *mitzvot* function as *itin* — advices for how to work on ourselves spiritually. At this stage, every *mitzvah* serves the same purpose of helping us develop our giving and love. We are training ourselves to be in divine service.

When we practice a *mitzvah*, we try to be aware that we are in the presence of God and act accordingly. The inner work is to be mindful of our *emuna* and love, and yearn to deepen them. Although there are many different *mitzvot*, at first they all serve the same purpose — developing our giving, love, and awareness of God.

Through our spiritual work in Torah and *mitzvot*, we strive to attain the level of “giving to give”, also known as *l'shem shamayim* or *lishma*. This is an exalted spiritual state of practicing *mitzvot* without any self-serving intention, motivated only by love. Then the *mitzvot* reveal their second aspect — *pekudin*. Now, instead of every *mitzvah* serving the same

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purpose, each one becomes a unique channel of divine energy, each flowing its own special spiritual light and wondrous pleasure of divine experience.

When first beginning the spiritual practice of *mitzvot*, the number of practices can feel overwhelming. It is similar to someone just starting to exercise walking into a large fitness center filled with hundreds of machines. Just as we would begin with a few basic exercises, learning to do them properly before gradually adding more, so too with *mitzvot*. The spiritual “muscle” we are developing is unconditional love. The same way a physical trainer guides us in using the equipment properly, a spiritual teacher helps us connect with the *mitzvot* in a healthy, balanced, and meaningful way that supports our personal growth.

Every time we perform a *mitzvah*, we are given the opportunity to go beyond what we might naturally do, and act in divine service. Acting beyond our nature is already a step toward transcending the ego. The deeper work is to become aware of our true intention. Why am I doing this *mitzvah* right now? Am I hoping for a reward? Am I serving God or serving myself? Do I feel the presence of God? Am I performing this *mitzvah* as I would if God’s presence were revealed?

Reflecting on questions like these while practicing *mitzvot* develops our spiritual awareness. Although each *mitzvah* contains infinite layers of meaning, they all direct us toward the same purpose — developing our giving and love and connection with God.

The *mitzvot* train us to develop our *emuna* and love — but only if we engage with them for that purpose. The Sages taught, “*lo lishma yavo lishma*” — practicing *mitzvot* without spiritual consciousness will

eventually lead us to spiritual consciousness. Many people mistakenly think this means that simply performing *mitzvot* is enough and that no inner work is necessary. Kabbalah says otherwise.

The Rabash explains that practicing *mitzvot* without the intention to develop our giving and love is “*lo lishma yavo l’lo lishma*” — practicing *mitzvot* without spiritual consciousness that leads only to more self-serving practice. The Rabash explains that the Sages’ expression “*lo lishma yavo lishma*” refers to being aware of our lack of giving and love and consciously practicing *mitzvot* in order to develop our giving and love. This inner work is what brings us to the state of giving and love that is called *lishma*.

This is why learning Kabbalah is so essential. To attain the inner transformation we are meant to reach through Torah and *mitzvot*, we need to engage with them consciously — with the intention of inner transformation. Kabbalah guides us in how to do this.

Once we understand that the practice of *mitzvot* is meant to develop our giving and love, we can begin to see how the spiritual practices themselves reflect this. Here are some examples:

Shabbat Candles

There is a *mitzvah* to light Shabbat candles. We light the candles as the sun begins to set, right before Shabbat begins. Traditionally, we light two candles, and if we are parents, an additional candle for each of our children. When we light the candles, we pause for a few moments of reflection as we welcome in the Shabbat. We pray for ourselves, our

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family, our friends, those we love, and the entire world. We consider all that we have to be grateful for and give thanks. We open our hearts to feel God's presence more deeply as the light of Shabbat comes in.

One of many meditations on the two Shabbat candles is that they represent giving and receiving in their elevated states — giving to give and receiving to give. The elevated consciousness of Shabbat gives us a taste of these high spiritual levels we have been learning about.

Tallit and Tefillin

A meditation for wrapping ourselves in a tallit is yearning to be wrapped in the light of *emuna*.

Tefillin contain four holy passages of the Torah, each expressing different aspects of giving and love. These four passages reflect the four levels of spiritual development that we have been learning about.

When we perform the mitzvah of tefillin, we use our right arm to bind our left arm with the tefillin. The right arm represents giving and the left arm represents receiving. We begin the day by symbolically binding our desire to receive with our desire to give.

(For someone who is left handed, the symbolism is reversed: the left hand represents giving and the tefillin is wrapped on the right arm.)

The arm tefillin is placed beside the heart, representing the spiritual work of the heart — to give. The head tefillin represents the spiritual work of the mind — *emuna*.

TORAH AND MITZVOT

Bowing

When we bow in prayer, we lower both our body and our head and strive to deepen our awareness that we are in the presence of God.

Lowering our body represents the work of the heart — lowering our ego and giving. Lowering our head represents the work of the mind — striving to transcend our understanding and have *emuna*. Rising up from bowing reflects acknowledging the lower aspects of ourselves and striving to elevate them.

Hand Washing

There is a *mitzvah* to wash our hands in a special way when we wake up in the morning. We wash with three alternating pours of water, representing *kav yamin*, *kav smol*, and *kav emtzaee* — right, left, and center consciousness. Our right hand corresponds to *kav yamin*, our left hand to *kav smol*, and the alternating pours reflect our striving to integrate them through *kav emtzaee*.

Our hands can be used to receive or give. We wash them with water, representing Torah, expressing our striving to purify our receiving and transform it into giving through spiritual learning and practice.

These are just a few simple examples of how our inner work is reflected in the *mitzvot* themselves. Kabbalah goes into great depth about the spiritual meaning of the *mitzvot* and our inner work when performing them.

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The practice of *mitzvot* requires discipline. When we take on a *mitzvah*, the spiritual work is to practice it consistently. If we perform a *mitzvah* only when we feel like it, we are not really working on ourselves. Transcending our desire to receive means engaging in spiritual practice even when we don't feel like it. By practicing *mitzvot* regularly, we learn to rise above our ego and live in divine service. We learn to act from love.

Sometimes when we perform a *mitzvah*, we feel spiritual and joyful and do it with all our heart. Other times, we don't feel anything and may even struggle to do it at all. We naturally assume that the heartfelt times are more spiritual and that the times we struggle are less so. Often, it is the other way around.

We develop spiritually through our effort. When we feel spiritual, it is easy for us to perform the *mitzvot* and they don't require much effort. When we don't feel spiritual, and we struggle to perform *mitzvot*, it requires great effort — and through that effort we grow spiritually.

Our spiritual development comes from the effort we make. Striving to give and love is how we develop our giving and love. Although we naturally prefer to feel spiritual rather than struggle, Kabbalah teaches us how precious our effort is and helps us learn to value it.

Kabbalah explains that every *mitzvah* sets in motion cosmic happenings far beyond anything we can imagine. The boundless blessing that flows through the *mitzvot* is intentionally hidden from us because the holiness and pleasure would be overwhelming. We would feel that the merit of performing even one *mitzvah* was more than enough for our entire lives. More than that, if the spiritual pleasure were revealed, we wouldn't be able to perform *mitzvot* from love — our motivation would be the pleasure itself.

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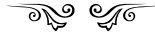
For these reasons, what spiritually happens when we perform the *mitzvot* is concealed from us. This concealment gives us the opportunity to practice them with *emuna* and love. When we become able to perform *mitzvot* purely from love, the spiritual pleasure can be revealed — to the extent that we can enjoy it without it becoming our motivation.

Kabbalah explains that when humanity completes its spiritual development, we will reach a final state called *Gamar HaTikun*. At that time, every *mitzvah* and every act of kindness ever done — from the beginning of time to the end of time — will be revealed, shining boundless goodness and pleasure in the eternal divine experience that awaits us. If this were revealed now, we would naturally run non-stop to help others and perform *mitzvot*. Because it is hidden, the practice of *mitzvot* involves the spiritual work of giving and *emuna*.

The way we progress spiritually is through Torah and *mitzvot* — spiritual learning and spiritual practice. Spiritual learning inspires us and guides us along the path. Spiritual practice is how we actually work on ourselves. At the heart of everything is elevating our desire to receive to the desire to give. Beyond this transformation, nothing else needs to happen.

Before the *tzimtzum*, we experienced all the divine goodness. The whole purpose of its concealment — and the spiritual journey we are now going through — is to elevate the way we experience the goodness. This transformation from receiving to giving is the entire essence of Torah and *mitzvot*.

PRINCIPLE 18 APPRECIATION



We have to be thankful for any spiritual awareness we are given. When we recognize that even a spark of spiritual connection is a magnificent gift from God, we become grateful and our love for God deepens. The greatness of a gift is measured by the importance of the giver of the gift. The more we become aware of the importance of the giver, the more we value the gift.

When we appreciate every drop of spirituality that we are given, we are given more and more.

APPRECIATION

A small gift — even a tiny flower or pebble — from someone we love is precious to us. We value the gift because of the one who gave it. In the same way, the more we develop awareness of the exaltedness of God, the more we appreciate any spiritual connection God gives us. Even a moment of thought about God is a precious gift.

The formula of spiritual work is *kav yamin*, *kav smol*, and *kav emtzaee* — right, left, and center consciousness. *Kav yamin* is thankfulness and appreciation. *Kav smol* is focusing on what needs to be fixed. *Kav emtzaee* is returning to *kav yamin* after engaging with *kav smol*. Although we set aside time to work with *kav smol*, we always begin and end with appreciation.

Our spiritual work is to be thankful — thankful for what we have and thankful for what we don't. Spiritual learning and practice not only deepen our awareness of God's goodness, they also help us appreciate the times when the goodness is hidden. We learn to appreciate the opportunity to have unconditional love and *emuna*.

Kabbalah reveals that the goodness God is bestowing upon us is beyond anything we can imagine. We are gradually learning how to receive it. The more we appreciate what we are given and are thankful, the more we are given.



ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS



ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Where does Kabbalah come from?

Across the generations, for thousands of years, there have been people who have ascended to very high spiritual levels and passed on to us their insight and guidance.

This exalted spiritual wisdom, handed down across the ages by the Sages, is Kabbalah — the inner spiritual wisdom of Judaism. It has been passed down through holy books and word-of-mouth transmission. Its purpose is to awaken us to our higher calling and to guide us on our wondrous spiritual journey.

The oral teachings of the ancient Sages were compiled into two extensive bodies of holy writings — the Mishnah and the Zohar. The Mishnah records the details of *halacha* — our external spiritual practice. The Zohar discusses the details of *kavana* — our inner spiritual work. Together, the Mishnah and the Zohar are the oral tradition of Judaism, known as *Torah Sh'be'al Peh*.

The Mishnah is the body of Torah. The Zohar is the soul of Torah.

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Higher Pleasures

Our spiritual work is to develop our desire to give. Although this is challenging, it does not mean striving to overcome pleasure. Everything we do is for pleasure. The work is to strive for higher pleasures — the pleasures of giving. Through spiritual learning and practice, we develop our love and awareness of God. The more we develop, the more pleasure we find in giving and the more we truly enjoy. We were created to enjoy.

Our Divine Essence

Our soul has a body aspect and a soul aspect. The body aspect is the desire to receive, and the soul aspect is the light of God that shines within it.

Since spiritual reality transcends time and space, our final perfected state of receiving in order to give already exists within us right now. Our spiritual work is to reveal our inner divine essence that is always shining God's light.

Love

When we love deeply, the pleasure of the one we love is more precious to us than our own.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Giving

Giving means striving to love others and do what we can for them. It does not mean giving everything away. Giving in one place can mean not being able to give somewhere else. We also need to take care of ourselves. It is important to give in a healthy way and to consider where to focus our giving. In some situations, giving is unhealthy — both for the giver and the receiver. Giving means striving to be aware that we are in the presence of God and acting accordingly.

Direct Light and Returning Light

Experiencing God and receiving God's love is called "direct light". Believing in God and giving love to God is called "returning light".

A basic principle of Kabbalah is that returning light is the vessel for direct light. This means we experience God's giving and love to the extent that we give and love.

We naturally want it the other way around — to first experience God's giving and love and then love back. But this is not how it works. First, we need to learn to truly love. Then, we can experience God in the most beautiful way.

This is expressed in the Star of David. The triangle pointing up represents returning light, and the triangle pointing down represents direct light.

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Our Universal Soul

We are souls that exist beyond time and space. All of us together — every soul that has ever existed and ever will exist — are aspects of one universal soul called the soul of Adam and Eve. Presently, our universal soul is expressed as billions of individual souls living within time and space so that we can learn to truly love. When we complete our spiritual development we will realize our true oneness.

Tikun Olam and Matarat Habriya

First, we are learning to reach a state of pure giving and unconditional love — giving in order to give. This is *tikun olam* — the fixing of creation.

Then, we become ready to experience God's boundless goodness in a state of giving and love — receiving in order to give. This is *matarat habriya* — the purpose of creation.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

The Nations of the World

All of our souls — everyone who has ever lived and ever will live — are expressions of one universal soul, the soul of Adam and Eve. Just as a single body has many parts, our universal soul has many dimensions, and each of us embodies a unique aspect of it. Individually and collectively, our souls are developing toward the state of pure giving and unconditional love that enables us to experience our oneness and God's boundless goodness.

Kabbalah explains that our universal soul has seventy facets, which are soul-roots of the nations of the world. Each nation is a unique aspect of our universal soul and has a special role to play in the spiritual evolution of humanity.

Oneness in Judaism does not mean sameness. Every person is a unique reflection of God's light. Each of us is here to elevate a distinct aspect of our universal soul — something no one else can do. Since every soul and experience of God is unique, God's light shines through us like a crystal with a multitude of colors.

This is reflected in the twelve tribes of Israel. One might wonder: Judaism is all about realizing our oneness, so why identify as tribes?

Oneness is more beautiful than everyone being the same. The goal is not to become identical, but for each of us to shine our own special light in the world. As each person, tribe, and nation elevates its unique qualities, all of humanity moves forward in our spiritual evolution.

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Kabbalah gives us insight into oneness as an inter-dynamic relationship of many integral parts, each with its own unique spiritual expression, working together harmoniously. Oneness is not about erasing differences, but appreciating them. The more we respect one another's differences and have love for each another, the more we experience God.

The Baal HaSulam teaches that humanity's ultimate spiritual task is to learn to truly love one another. This means caring for each other so deeply that we feel one another's pain and rejoice in one another's joy. When all the parts of our universal soul rise to their highest expression, and we finally relate to one another with genuine love and respect, we become able to experience God's boundless goodness.

We are one universal soul, with countless uniquely beautiful dimensions, learning to love one another and awaken to our oneness.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Reincarnation

We are spiritual beings who exist beyond time and space, and our souls journey through many different lifetimes.

Each lifetime is perfectly designed to help us ascend to our next level of spiritual development. We have free will, so our choices shape our path — yet our free will interfaces with divine providence which guides us in the most perfect way.

We are always spiritually developing — either consciously or unconsciously — and every moment of our lives is designed to help us grow. Eventually, all of us will complete our spiritual development toward unconditional love and union with God. The parts of ourselves that we do not succeed in spiritually elevating within our lifetime, we elevate in subsequent lifetimes.

The holy book “The Gate of Reincarnation” records the teachings of the great spiritual master, the Ari, about reincarnation. The Ari gives us deep insight into the intricate spiritual mechanics through which our souls develop and ascend over the course of many lifetimes.

While knowing that our souls journey through different lifetimes helps us understand the larger picture, trying to uncover details of our previous lives is not encouraged in Kabbalah. There is nothing we need to know about our past lifetimes — everything we need for our spiritual development is in our life right now.

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Rebbe Gottlieb learned for fourteen years from Rebbe Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag, a son and main disciple of the Baal HaSulam. Rebbe Gottlieb said that in all those years he never once heard Rebbe Baruch Shalom speak about the afterlife. This is remarkable. Even though Kabbalah describes our eternal nature and the exalted divine reality that awaits us, the spiritual masters are focused on the present moment — on connecting to God right now.

The World to Come

Olam Haba — The World to Come — is a state of consciousness that can be experienced even now.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Spiritual Language

Our Sages explain spiritual concepts that transcend time and space using the language of our material world. The Baal HaSulam shows us how to understand this spiritual language.

For example, when the Zohar says that Rebbe Yitzchak and Rebbe Yossi were traveling from Tíveria to Lod, the Baal HaSulam explains that it is not describing a physical journey between two places. The names of the Rebbes represent states of consciousness ascending to spiritual realms represented by the names of the places.

The Baal HaSulam explains that every word of the Zohar is spiritual and not meant to be understood literally.

Angels

Angels in Kabbalah are not what we see in paintings or how people generally imagine them. Angels refer to states of consciousness. Their names signify the spiritual dynamics they express. Their wings are not physical wings — they describe our ascent into higher spiritual realms.

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Kav Emtzaee in Prayer

Kav emtzaee is a framework we can use in prayer.

Kav yamin — right consciousness — is joyfulness and appreciation. *Kav smol* — left consciousness — is focusing on what is lacking and what needs to be fixed. *Kav emtzaee* — middle consciousness — is the integration of *kav yamin* and *kav smol*.

Using this approach, we begin to pray with *kav yamin*. We contemplate to whom we are praying — the source of all reality that is flowing unconditional love and boundless goodness. We contemplate God's infinite exaltedness and love for us, beyond anything we can imagine. The more we deepen our awareness that we are in the presence of God, the more joyful we become. This is right consciousness.

Next, we move into *kav smol* — left consciousness. *Kav smol* means feeling what we are lacking. In this stage of prayer, we ask for what we want. On a lower spiritual level, we ask to get. On a higher spiritual level, we ask to give. Whatever the spiritual level, recognizing what we want and asking for it is the left-consciousness aspect of prayer.

Finally, after expressing everything we want in *kav smol*, we move into *kav emtzaee* — center consciousness. In this context, *kav emtzaee* means being thankful after being in *kav smol*. There are two reasons to be thankful. The first is that God answers our prayers. If we are going to receive everything we just asked for, we are naturally joyful and thankful. The second reason to be thankful is more difficult. We are thankful because we have *emuna* that if our requests are not fulfilled, it is only because God wants to give us something even greater.

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To have this *emuna* and be just as thankful without receiving what we asked for is the deep spiritual work of *kav emtzaee*.

This basic formula for prayer is:

1. Right Consciousness: contemplating God's exaltedness, boundless goodness, and love
2. Left Consciousness: acknowledging our wants and needs
3. Center Consciousness: being thankful

Kavana

Kavana means intention — what is in our heart and mind when we are doing something. Although Kabbalah describes countless *kavanot* for prayers and *mitzvot*, in essence everything we do is guided by one of two intentions — striving to get or striving to give.

A *kavana* that can be used for every word of prayer is to strive to be aware of whom we are praying to.

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The Treasury Metaphor

The Rabash shared a metaphor. Two childhood friends had not seen each other for many years. In the meantime, one became a king, while the other remained very poor. One day, the poor friend came to his old friend, the king, to ask for help. The king ordered the royal treasury to be opened for a limited time and told his friend to take whatever he wanted.

The guard let him into the vast treasury, overflowing with gold and jewels. He filled his small bag with treasure and walked toward the exit, but the guard threw everything onto the ground. Confused, yet knowing he still had time, he went back inside, refilled his bag, and again the guard threw the treasure onto the floor. This repeated again and again.

Finally, as the time was ending, the friend was crying and took one last bag of treasure. At the door he pleaded with the guard, "Please don't throw it down. This is my last chance."

The guard replied, "You don't understand. All the treasure I threw on the ground is yours. I only kept throwing it down so that you would take home so much more."

Every *mitzvah* and act of kindness contains immeasurable spiritual blessing. It is concealed from us — "thrown to the ground" — so that we will continue our work. The Zohar says that all of the spiritual treasure — of everyone throughout all time — is being held for us. In the final cosmic moment of *Gamar HaTikun*, it will be revealed and shine forever.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Shabbat

Shabbat is celebrated as an uplifted spiritual day and is one of the deepest practices. Six days of the week we do everything we can to fix ourselves and the world. On Shabbat we give thanks.

Shabbat begins as the sun is setting, and we light candles to welcome in the spiritual day. Before lighting the candles, we turn off our phones and put them away — we go completely offline for the entire day.

Throughout Shabbat we share special meals with family and friends and enjoy meaningful time together. We don't go to work, travel by car, or use money. We have time for spiritual learning, praying, meditating, being with friends, and simply enjoying the day.

During Shabbat we try to focus on the good and be grateful — to spend the day in *kav yamin*. When thoughts of *kav smol* arise, we remind them that it is Shabbat and that we will attend to them afterward. On Shabbat we try to live in the moment, appreciate all we have been given, and give thanks to God.

When Shabbat ends, we perform the ceremony of *havdalah* and begin the new week spiritually uplifted and renewed. Once we've experienced Shabbat, we can't imagine living without it.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

Emuna

We naturally prefer to experience God's goodness rather than believe in it. This is because receiving is more precious to us than giving. Kabbalah guides us to realize that giving is more precious than receiving — that *emuna* in God's goodness is, in some ways, more precious than its revelation.

The Land of Israel

One who is drawn to the secrets of the Torah is drawn to the land of Israel.

Torah Learning

The purpose of learning Torah is not to accumulate intellectual information. It is to learn wisdom of the heart.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Paradigm Shift

The ancient Prophets of Israel said that far in the future the people of Israel would return to the land of Israel, and that the inner light of Torah would shine out to the entire world, awakening a new era of spiritual consciousness.

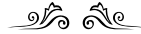
For the past two thousand years the people of Israel have mostly been in exile — praying every single day, three times a day, to return home. After two millennia, these ancient prophecies are now being fulfilled. The people of Israel are returning home from all over the world by the millions. It is a miracle unfolding before our eyes.

At the same time, Kabbalah is coming into the world in a way it never has before. Until recently, most people couldn't understand the holy books of Kabbalah because they were so complex. Now, through the Baal HaSulam and other great masters, Kabbalah is being explained in a way that everyone can understand its essential ideas. This revelation of Kabbalah — and the higher consciousness it awakens — is what the ancient Prophets spoke about.

Everything has an aspect of body and an aspect of soul. For the nation of Israel, living outside the land of Israel corresponds to the aspect of body, and living inside the land of Israel corresponds to the aspect of soul. For the past two thousand years, most of the people of Israel have been outside the land of Israel, and the focus of Torah learning has been primarily on the body aspect of Torah — *halacha*. Now, as the people of Israel return to the land of Israel, the main focus of Torah learning is meant to shift to the soul of Torah — Kabbalah.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

We are in an epic moment of paradigm shift from body to soul. In the physical realm, this is reflected in the people of Israel returning from exile to the land of Israel. In the spiritual realm, this is reflected in the inner light of Torah shining throughout the world. This outpouring of Kabbalah — and the higher consciousness it is awakening — is the dawning of Mashiach.



Mashiach

People generally think of Mashiach as a person we are waiting for — someone who will arrive, solve all of our problems, bring peace to the world, and reveal God's goodness to everyone. Kabbalah, however, primarily describes Mashiach as a process of inner transformation that every one of us is going through.

God's goodness is already flowing. It is simply waiting for us to be ready to receive it. To reveal God's boundless goodness, we need to spiritually develop to the state of unconditional love and pure giving. This is the spiritual work each of us is here to do — and nobody else can do it for us. It is not an external change that will reveal God, but a change within ourselves. The moment giving becomes more precious to us than receiving, we will experience the divine goodness that is already here waiting for us.

The four letters of the Hebrew word Mashiach משיח when arranged in a different order, spell *yismach* ישמח — “will rejoice”. Mashiach represents the joy of experiencing God. The great spiritual masters from whom we are learning already experience God deeply and are guiding us along the way.

It is a mistake to think of Mashiach as someone we are waiting for to step onto the stage and solve all the problems of the world while we applaud from the sidelines. When Mashiach comes to help, we can certainly applaud — but we are the ones on the stage right now, and the work is in our hands to do. The more we strive to develop our giving and love, the more we bring the spiritual consciousness that is Mashiach into the world. We are not waiting for Mashiach — Mashiach is waiting for us.

The Light of Mashiach

On a simple level, Mashiach is the most important person in the world. Imagine someone so important asking us for help with something. We would feel deeply honored, and it would be a great privilege to help. If that person offered to pay us, we wouldn't take the money — helping someone so important would be our pleasure.

Now imagine someone not so important asking us for the same help. If it's something we don't feel like doing, we might say, "I'm sorry, but I'm too busy right now." Why the difference? Because helping someone extremely important is a pleasure, whereas helping someone we consider unimportant is a burden.

Kabbalah guides us to realize that every person is divine and infinitely important. When we come to see every person in the world as the Mashiach — as the most important person in the world — everything changes. It becomes a great joy to be of service to everyone. When we treat everyone in the world as Mashiach — this is Mashiach.

Of course, we need to learn how to live this practically — it doesn't mean giving away everything we own or giving in ways that are unhealthy or unwise. Mashiach is when our focus shifts from getting to giving. Many people think Mashiach is when we are finally going to get. In truth, Mashiach is when we are finally going to give.

Kabbalah guides us in how to do this — and this is why Kabbalah itself is the light of Mashiach.

The Shofar of Mashiach

We have a tradition that Eliyahu the Prophet will appear and sound the shofar to herald the arrival of the Mashiach. Many people imagine Eliyahu the Prophet in a white robe, standing on a mountaintop in Yerushalayim, blowing a shofar to announce that the Mashiach is on the way.

The Sages express deep spiritual concepts through their holy words. The Baal HaSulam explains that the revelation of Eliyahu represents the revelation of the inner spiritual wisdom of Torah — Kabbalah. Sounding the shofar symbolizes making something known to everyone. So, the saying of the Sages that Eliyahu will blow the shofar to announce the coming of Mashiach is coded language, meaning that the widespread revelation of Kabbalah is what ushers in the era of Mashiach.

When the inner spiritual wisdom of Torah becomes known in the world, it guides us to truly love one another and raises the consciousness of humanity. This spiritual awakening is the coming of Mashiach.

Spiritual Principles

This book of spiritual principles is only a very brief introduction to the spiritual method taught by the Baal HaSulam. We are blessed with thousands of pages of holy writings from the Baal HaSulam, Rebbe Baruch Shalom HaLevi Ashlag, and Rebbe Gottlieb that explore our inner spiritual work in great depth. Although these principles have been passed down by the Sages since ancient times and are nothing new, the way the Baal HaSulam has expressed them so simply and clearly is revolutionary.

Even though these principles are essential, many people, including those who learn Torah and practice *mitzvot*, are not yet familiar with them. They are expressed simply, but they are far from simple. They describe the path of spiritual development and are at the heart of everything that happens in our lives and in the world. When we take these principles to heart and strive to live with them, our lives are uplifted in beautiful and wondrous ways.

It is hard to appreciate how great a treasure this spiritual wisdom is — a treasure more valuable than anything in the world. The spiritual masters are guiding us to unconditional love and boundless goodness. They are giving us the keys to our spiritual journey and connection with God.

ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

The One Thing to Remember

The heart of all spiritual learning and practice is striving to deepen our awareness that we are in the presence of God and learning to see God in everyone. Rebbe Baruch Shalom Ashlag once joked, “Our spiritual work is actually very easy. We only have to remember one thing. What’s the one thing we need to remember? — God!”



THE MORE WE DESIRE TO GIVE,
THE MORE WE ARE IN UNION WITH GOD



For more information and further resources:

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