

Experiencing the Divine:
A Practical Jewish Guide

by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira
(the Pieseszner Rebbe)

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A number of young men of my acquaintance wish to form a society dedicated to the spiritual goal of uniting God and the Community of Israel. With God's help, I am writing the following text for them. And it is appropriate that it be called **The Society for Positive Mindfulness (the original title: *Bnai Machshavah Tovah*)**.

“One thing have I asked of Hashem, I will request it . . . to view the pleasantness of Hashem and to contemplate within His palace” (*Tehillim* 27:4).

(Translator's note: In keeping with the usage of the original, the generic pronoun “he” has been employed and not replaced with such formulations as “he or she.” This does not, of course, detract from the relevance of this work for women.)

4 *Experiencing the Divine:*

🕯 The Goal of This Group

Our goal is not new. It is no different from the goal and hope of every Jew. Our desire and goal is to serve Hashem our God: the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Yaacov. We seek a wholehearted service, a complete service that utilizes all the limbs of our body and spirit, so that not one sinew of our body nor one spark of our spirit will extend beyond the holiness of Hashem that hovers upon us and encompasses us.

And therefore, we pray: “Our Father, Compassionate Father, have mercy on us. Awaken within our heart a spark of desire and awareness, so that we will know that it is not enough to be like a mere slave, the son of a maidservant. It is true that he too serves the King, but he works behind the millstones, far from the King. He does not hear the King’s words, nor does he ever experience any satisfaction or pleasure from the King’s radiance. Instead, he serves the King with a closed mind and a dulled heart.”

But our desire and longing is to be among those who are called “the children of Hashem your God,” so that in our service of

God, whether in learning Torah, prayer or other commandments, we feel our closeness to God. We wish to be like the son rejoicing to greet his father after an absence of years and after having suffered in his great yearnings for his father. When we serve God, we should also feel our soul racing to greet its father, our soul that has yearned for Him all day and all night. Now it races and dissolves as it is poured onto the bosom of its Father in heaven.

And not only at times of prayer and other service should we feel close to God and take pleasure from the radiance of His glory, may He be blessed. Rather, our thought should always be so clear, strong and connected to His holiness that it can overwhelm our senses. Then our senses will be unable to confuse our thoughts and turn them astray and tell us that “this world you see is everything, and this physicality that you sense is everything.” And even more, our senses will be subjugated to the thought of our heart, so that themselves will perceive God’s holiness permeating all being.

Then, with our own eyes, we will see that we are in God’s garden, Eden, standing before God’s Throne of glory (may He be blessed).

It is precisely this that is the goal of our society.

🕯 The Composition of the Group

🕯 One: Beyond The Honors of This World

The purpose of our society is not to attain power and involve ourselves in political and communal matters, whether directly and with a particular agenda, or indirectly. Our goal is to ascend: to take a step that rises beyond the entire world, its commotion and its turmoil. Therefore, our group will not apportion honors to a president, vice president, and so forth, because the foundation of our group is humility and exaltation: the humility of the essence of body and lower spirit, and the exaltation of their holiness.

And in a place where holiness is revealed, there is no place for honors and titles.

❖ **Two: To Extinguish the Fire**

And also, we make a strong bond of commitment that our group should not, heaven forbid, be in any way insular and isolated from those Jews who are not a part of our group. To the contrary, the first principle and basis of our group is the love of the Jewish people and the love of friends, in the strongest possible manner.

Imagine if a fire broke out in the city, and the fire department came to put it out and rescue people, using its professional techniques. Would the firemen hate and drive away the residents who were also involved in the rescue work and in extinguishing the fire—each to the best of his ability? Certainly not. After all, they all have one common goal: to put the fire out and save the people engulfed in its flames. The only difference amongst them is that everyone is doing rescue work in his own way. The fire department is most successful, for that which a group can do no individual can accomplish.

Each of us is constantly concerned and anguished about his life. “What will ultimately become of me? Day after day, I yearn to be close to God with my every thought, word and act and at the very least not to be far from Him and thrown into the thick mire (heaven forbid). Yet every day I destroy this yearning with my own hands. I do not even wait for God to cast me away from His countenance. Of my own initiative, I cast myself into uncharted territories of chaos and void, amidst spiritual forces corresponding to donkeys, mules and dogs.”

What will our end be? Our days and years have passed this way, and in our impoverishment we give vent to groans. Will we only awaken when we reach our last day on earth? Then will we beat our

hearts and cry, “Woe, what did I do? Why is my soul and body engulfed in pollution, and nauseating worthlessness? My entire lifetime was one mass of uncleanness and foul, degraded desires, thoughts and lusts, which I now find repellent. And in addition to that, foolishness and meaningless things were the constant occupation of my soul. With my own hands, I removed myself from the world of holiness and purity, the sanctity of God, and threw myself into the pit of pollution and ugliness.”

This worry gnaws constantly at the heart and pierces the brain of each of us. Each one of us worries and sighs, but finds no remedy to heal his broken heart.

Therefore, we have joined together to find means appropriate for people as lowly in spirit as we are, with which to serve the one God. And at the very least we hope that God will help us so that we will not waste our days in the depths, but that we will be able to unify our hearts with the One God, and take refuge in His shadow while we are still in this world.

❖ Three: To Keep a Secret

Therefore, our group will only accept those who share these concerns. As for those others who know in their souls that they do not fulfill these conditions and do not fall into this category, we ask them, “Do not enter our group and fool yourselves and us. Do not spoil the other members’ pure hearts and clean minds.”

Even more than that, I am not so pleased that such a person should even read this book.

Perhaps this is alluded to in the words of the midrash that the Jews did not reveal their “mysteries” in Egypt. We are told explicitly that the Jews did not reveal the secret that before “a [Jewish] woman would request an item of her [Egyptian] neighbor” (*Shemot* 11:2) the Jewish woman had already discovered that item during the plague of darkness.

But even more than that, they did not reveal the “mysteries”: all things having to do with the soul. These must be kept secret and hidden, for it is not right that when naked souls are cleansing themselves of their impurity others should be watching. Consider this well.

❖ Four: Who May Join This Society

Further on, God willing, we will set forth the regulations of the group.

But at any rate, at the very beginning we must make it clear that only the following may apply to and become a member of this holy group:

1. You must be a person who truly feels pain and sorrow at your distance from God. You not only recognize your low state intellectually—which everyone realizes this intellectually, unless he is insane or drunk—but in your heart you truly feel the pain because of an embittered soul. This causes you no less concern than do your physical problems. Not only that, at times this weighs so heavily upon you that you cry over the sufferings of your soul and the lowness of

your being.

2. You must be a *ben Torah*, dedicated to learning and keeping Torah—to a greater or lesser extent.

3. Whether you are a merchant, craftsman, or whatever, you must meet with the group at least three times a week. And you must meticulously adhere to the group regulations, which will be described further on, God willing.

4. You must not be inconstant by nature, impetuously coming to a decision one day and forgetting about it the next, casually trampling upon your commitments and “overturning the pot.”

5. You must not be a liar, a dissembler immersed in his own falsehoods.

Some people lie occasionally, heaven forbid. This is very bad, God have mercy, but such a person can at any rate repent of this behavior, after which he would be a candidate to join our group.

But there is another kind of person, one who is in his essence a dissembler and liar, a man who fools not only others but himself as well.

My honored and holy father-in-law quoted a *tzaddik* to the effect that such person cannot repent, because even his repentance is false, since he fools himself and imagines that in one moment he has become righteous. But in truth, he is not righteous, he has not acted correctly, and he has not accomplished anything.

❖ Techniques and Theory

❖ One: Overcoming Our Forgetfulness

The Jewish people were rebuked for having “having forgotten God, Who formed you” (Devarim 32:18).

This forgetfulness is the principle factor that distances a person from God.

In the prayer that he composed, R. Elimelech of Lizhensk states, “May our mind be pure, clear, clean and strong.”

Everyone knows that if he were to literally see with his own eyes that he is standing before God, he would cease to have an evil inclination. Instead, he would pour forth his entire spirit and soul in holy words to God until he would become nothing and be absorbed into God.

But we do not have to go so far. Everyone feels how his evil inclination ceases to exist even if he no more than focuses his mind and thought strongly upon God. Then all of its poison, which usually bubbles through his senses, is nullified before God. For example, on

Yom Kippur (particularly, during Kol Nidrei and Neilah) doesn't every Jew feel that all his lusts, fantasies and improper desires no longer exist, since at that moment his thought is clear and strongly focused on God?

The very essence of the imperfection caused by our human descent is that "you have forgotten God Who has formed you." A person descends from his mindfulness. It is not always pure, clear and strong as it is on Yom Kippur and other such times. Even if someone wanted to strengthen and empower his mind and thought, he could not maintain this mindfulness consistently for any significant period of time.

And so all our work must center on how to strengthen our mindfulness: how to broaden it, empower it, perfect it and bind it to God—and not only during such times as shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but so that it will always be clear, strong and bound to holiness.

☪ Two: Working Upon the Mind

Ideally, this service of mindfulness should begin from below and rise upwards. In other words, at first a person should purify his body. Then his thought will automatically be purified and strengthened. But one should not begin by working on one's mind.

And so in earlier generations, people began by working on and purifying their bodies. Having completely purified their bodies so that they experienced a body that is subservient to holiness, they would arrive at the work and purification of mindfulness. This was the

superior path.

However, now, in our generation of “the heels of the messiah,” a dwarfish generation, a generation of “heels,” this is not so. Our bodies are weak, and this is the cause of a great lack of self-control, an inability to rule over ourselves and our bodies. If in these days a person were to begin his service by purifying and sanctifying his body, he would attain nothing. His body would not be purified, and certainly not his thought, which he would never even touch upon or attempt to purify and strengthen. His body would remain in its state of dwarfishness and darkness, repellent and rejected.

Thus, we must begin our work with mindfulness.

And so we have called our group the Society for Positive Mindfulness. Its purpose is to strengthen and reveal a good thought within us, to perfect it and expand it so that it not remain a wispy, momentary flash of a spark that is swiftly extinguished—but that it will become pure and strong, until it will subjugate the entire body, until it will subsume all bodily senses, appearing and ruling in us.

I will demonstrate that we do not first have to sanctify our bodies.

Does every individual suddenly sanctify his entire body right before shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah or on Yom Kippur? Certainly not. Nevertheless, we see that a strong thought can even subjugate and sanctify a body that has not been sanctified.

And if that is the case, why should we allow mindfulness and its mighty spirit to sleep and rot in its lethargy within ourselves?

☛ **Three: The Need to Strengthen Mindfulness**

The perfection, broadening and strengthening of mindfulness is the fundamental concern of our group, and the principle method by means of which we will be able to attain a link with the service of God. Then we will not only be like the maidservant's firstborn standing behind the millstones and far from the king, but like the king's son who feels how close he is to his father and senses his father speaking to him.

Why is the attainment of such mindfulness so difficult and wearisome? Why does a person find it hard to strengthen this mindfulness and not allow it to weaken? There are two reasons for this.

The first cause is a lack of passion—whether of flaming joy or of a broken heart. When a Jew purifies himself, he is aflame. Even a modest awakening strengthens and purifies his mindfulness, bringing it to transcend physical images and their illusions (as we said earlier in regard to Yom Kippur).

A person lacks an elevated, nonphysical mindfulness only when his heart and mind are dulled. This is particularly so in the case of depression, heaven forbid. Depression is not a broken and bitter heart. It is rather a type of lacking and a dullness (as Rabbi Shneur Zalman teaches). On the eve of Yom Kippur, when a Jew feels that his heart is broken, his heart and mind are open—whereas during the rest of the year, if he is depressed, he sinks downward, lacking both heart and mind.

The second cause is that a person naturally lacks this strong mindfulness. When we encourage someone to strengthen his

mindfulness, it is as though we were to tell something complex to a person of limited intelligence, who—due to his natural limitations—cannot understand it. A person's mindfulness is by nature not as strong as it should be, even at a time of spiritual awakening (although then it does awaken and grow stronger). It is like the understanding of a person of limited intelligence, who at times strains his mind to understand some information with his diminished understanding. All of this mindfulness exists only at that inspired moment, and afterwards disappears.

But if a person possesses a strong mindfulness, when he awakens and is inspired, his mind strengthens and is clear, and in his thought and in his mind's eye (the mind's eye of the Jewish people, who are the children of prophets) he sees God, be He blessed, and His throne of glory—each person on his level. Even afterwards, when he is no longer aflame, he can access his previous state of mind without letting it weaken, and again see God's glory standing before him. This strong mindfulness that he controls can again awaken his flame whenever he prepares himself.

But this is not the case with a blemished person who lacks mindfulness. Even when he awakens and is aflame, all his mindfulness is a mere spark, comparable to the mind of a fool. And how much more is this true when he is no longer inspired, when he lacks every type of elevated thought and can think only of this-worldly matters: bread, potatoes, business, and the like. Therefore, he can be inspired only when this inspiration comes of itself—on Yom Kippur or at some other elevated time. Then he awakens. But he is incapable of actively awakening his inspiration in his mind and of elevating himself.

❖ Four: Exercising Mindfulness

But really, why isn't our mindfulness strong?

After all, mindfulness is not intellect. A person may lack a bright and keen intellect, but this has nothing to do with mindfulness.

Nor is mindfulness intellectual gymnastics and analysis. To the contrary, we are only seeking simple faith in God, and that this faith not be hidden and unconscious within us. "He believed in Hashem, and He considered it" (Breishit 15:6). But this verse may also be translated, "he believed in Hashem, and he himself considered." In other words, he himself meditated upon his belief. We wish to meditate upon our faith with a breadth of thought that will fill our entire body (as we will later discuss, God willing).

And since every Jew is descended from prophets, why should any of us lack this type of imagination and mindfulness? The answer is simply that we have not properly used and exercised it. This is like a physical ability: if you do not use it and exercise it, it will weaken. More than that, since we use our body and senses to take care of our needs but we do not employ our spiritual mindfulness that transcends the imaginings of our body, our physical endeavors overwhelm our mindfulness.

When a person has a nervous condition because his thought processes are damaged, physicians advise him to engage only in physical activities, without thinking, in order to calm his nerves. Then even his thoughts of physical things shrink and become less sensitive.

So when we wish to take this great step from the lowliness of the body to the work of mindfulness, we simply need to bring forth and reveal within ourselves a new and strong mindfulness, and to

exercise it—just as we bring forth a child’s ability to walk by practice.

Then we gain a double reward. Not only will a supernal mindfulness that we had never before sensed be revealed in us, but since we are working on mindfulness and strengthening it, the poisons of the bodily senses will weaken, just as physical work weakens thought. And these physical senses will themselves be transformed into the senses of the mind.

❖ Five: The Importance of Thought and Imagination

A simple Jew, simple beginner who has never experienced an elevated thought or visualization, might ask what appears to be an excellent question: What is all this eagerness, this religious frenzy, our eager trembling to apprehend thought and imagination in order to bring them forth and perfect them within ourselves?

After all, what are our thoughts in general, and what are they fit for? Our thoughts are only suited to think of and visualize trees, stones—the image and thoughts of physical things. And how will such thoughts and images help us? After all, when we stand in prayer, even when our mindful attention is strong and we seek awareness of the divine, there is nothing that we may think of, for it is forbidden to visualize God’s glory as having any physical image (cf. Maimonides, particularly in *Hilchos Teshuvah* and *Yesodei Hatorah*). And so in this world our thought is not ready to nor capable of visualizing and thinking of spiritual, abstract form.

If this is so, why should we strengthen, expand and perfect our thought—a thought and imagination that can only think about and

visualize houses, people, and the like? If we broaden thoughts of this nature, will they help raise us or set us before God's throne of glory while we are still in our body in this world?

Such a simple understanding might lead a person to conclude that expanding one's thought can, to the contrary, cast a person even more deeply into fantasy and turn him into a person filled with empty delusions.

But (as was said above), this point of view is worthy only of a person who stands at the onset of the work of mindfulness, not having yet perfected it, nor having yet experienced the taste of pure mindfulness. Since this person is immersed solely in activities that serve his body, and he also utilizes his thought for his bodily needs—thinking of how he will eat, drink, thinking about his business, and so forth—and the essence of his thought is still hidden within him and has yet to emerge, it seems to him that the revelation of thought and vision (which is a spark of prophecy) of which I now speak is only a magnification and expansion of his type of thought. And so he entertains these questions.

To what can this person be compared?

He is like a poor beggar who goes from door to door (God have mercy), who dreamed that he had been made king. In the morning, he was very upset and wept. If, just to support his family, he had to beg throughout the entire town, wearing himself out, now that he is king and has to support an entire army, it would not suffice even if he went begging throughout the entire world. And he does not have the strength of a rock. He cannot go to every door in the world in order to supply his soldiers.

The beggar thinks in this way because he is measuring his

sovereignty with the measuring yard of poverty. He thinks that he will have to support all his troops by begging from door to door, just as he supports his family in his poverty (heaven have mercy). He cannot raise himself beyond his impoverishment to understand that if he were king, the entire manner in which he would acquire provisions would be of a different order entirely.

Nevertheless, we must answer this questioner on his level. We must address him and deal with his error.

According to your opinion, we may tell him, thought is only capable of considering and visualizing physicality. In fact, you believe that thought is itself merely a physical power, just as the senses are.

But if that is the case, why is it that when you want to see something a mile away, you must have a clear view of it, whereas in your mind and brain, which is no bigger than a fist, you can even visualize something at a distance of ten miles?

From this, you can understand that thought in and of itself is not truly sensory and physical. It merely appears physical. And when, using our mind, we attempt to separate imagination and thought from the sense-influenced images that they create, then there will remain a spiritual thought that we do not see or feel, that we cannot know nor give a title to.

❖ Six: Pure Mindfulness

It is deplorable that human beings are so immersed in habit that they are unable to break free.

When a person is habituated to see only physical things in his

thoughts, it seems to him that thought itself is a physical and sensory phenomenon.

If this is your belief, you have erred, and not only regarding imagery and thought. Do not be so sure that even your senses are entirely physical. After all, you have never seen the sense of sight nor ever heard the sense of hearing. You have only sensed those things that sight sees or hearing hears. But once you are removed from the object that is seen or the sound that is heard, your sense of sight or hearing disappears. You do not sense them. And so in truth, why assume that the sense of sight itself is physical and can see nothing but physical things? Perhaps it is capable of seeing everything, including nonphysical things—but since you only bring it physical things, you have habituated it only to use its physical sight.

I have elsewhere spoken of how “the wisdom of a man illuminates his face” (Kohelet 8:1). Everyone can recognize whether someone else is intelligent or foolish, pure or coarse. Such sight is not physical, for whether someone is intelligent or foolish, pure or coarse, does not affect his features.

At every stage of a person’s ascent, there exists the stumbling block of an inability to transcend habit.

No matter how much we may want to explain reality to such a person, no matter how much we might wish to enlighten him, it is difficult to successfully bring him to realize that truth is the opposite of what his eyes perceive. His habit elicits a sort of hidden stubbornness in his heart that does not allow him to shift by a hair’s-breadth from his original conceptions.

How can we raise such person beyond the earth? When he hears words such as these, words that contradict his habitual

experience, he thinks and exclaims, “What is this man talking about? Is he saying that this world is not physical and that I myself do not know who I am? This man of the spirit person is mad!”

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Essentially, what you lack is the ability to expand your thought to pure mindfulness, stripped of physical form and image. You demand of every thought that arises in your mind a physical form and image, since you are habituated only to these types of thought. If this does not appear, you do not even recognize what you are experiencing as thought.

In truth, I am not saying that imageless thoughts never arise in your mind. They do. However, our consciousness possesses a critical filter that screens and checks all of our thoughts. Any thought not similar to this-worldly existence appears to that filter as counterfeit, and it pursues this thought and wipes it out of your mind.

For instance, although thoughts of impossible things arise in a child’s mind, such as that he can fly, and so forth. They do not enter an adult’s mind. The filtering faculty that has grown within him evaluates this thought and compares it to the things of this world that he can see and hear. So efficiently does it expel and deny any counterfeit thought that it seems to him that the thought never even entered his mind. This filter is so developed and has such influence on his mind that it blocks and intimidates any counterfeit thought from crossing the doorsill of his consciousness. He does not even sense this filtering faculty. Instead, it appears to him that these thoughts simply don’t occur to him.

And now in regard to our topic, it is not that you do not have any thought stripped of physical form. Such thoughts do arise within

you. But since the filter in your mind is habituated only to thoughts with form, it chases away any pure thought. Since you do not even sense this filtering faculty, it seems that no formless thought or imagination exists within you at all.

In truth, however, once a person is convinced that a true thought cannot resemble a this-worldly image, and once he has expanded and broadened pure thought within himself, when such a thought arises in him, he thinks, imagines and sees in accordance with the state of holiness and throne of glory of the root, the place from where his soul is hewn. He is not bothered by a lack of physical form and thus his filter does not block his thought.

However, when he starts to analyze this experience, asking “What am I thinking and seeing?,” he has already descended, and he can no longer understand himself and his previous thought. This analysis is a return to comparing his every thought to the thoughts and forms of this world.

☪ Seven: From Image to No-image

Let us not in one leap attempt to attain the abilities of a person who already experiences periods of positive mindfulness. Our desire is to elevate everyone in our group, so that everyone will be able to reach such holy moments and discover this positive mindfulness.

The analytical filter within us that demands that our every thought show a similarity to this-worldly thought is a great obstacle, one that does not allow us to attain any pure awareness—not even the inspiration of holiness and pure prayer.

And is this not the essential cause of a flaw in our belief and our awe and love of God?

A young man came to me and lamented, “If I could picture some image when I stand before God in prayer, I would be inspired, at least in a simple way, like a person begging an omnipotent being to save him. Or I would tremble and shake when I would have the thought and image that I am standing before God’s Throne of Glory. However, since it is forbidden to visualize any image or form, all I have is the concept that I am standing before God—a concept without substantive thought. But without a concrete thought, I cannot be inspired, unless it is some spontaneous inspiration, out of my control. And I am certainly unable to achieve an ongoing experience of fiery, passionate feeling.”

Perhaps this was underlying motive behind the sin of the mixed multitude, who said, “Make us a god who will go before us” (Shemot 32:1). They wanted a god that they could see. They went too far, however, and sought not only a mental image, but an physical one. And, even more egregious, they foolishly desired an image of the god of Egypt.

The basis of our group is that we do not rebuke and command people—for either they will not listen, or they will look at themselves and say that they already possess positive mindfulness and inspiration, even if that is not the case.

This is because everyone wants to be pure of heart and elevated. However, most people cannot rise beyond the flotsam in which they are afloat.

The entire purpose of our group is to raise people. We will lower our shoulders to whatever low level another member may be on,

down to the soles of the feet of his spirit and body, and from there we will raise him, using means appropriate to his condition.

Group members must be given exercises and counsel appropriate to their level, which will help them habituate themselves to mindfulness. And so, in this spirit, my counsel is that a person in such a situation—at the beginning of the growth and expanding of his mindfulness—should depend upon the view of the Ravad, who responded to the Rambam: “Why does he call a person [who attributes physicality to God] a sectarian? A number of great and good people . . . have entertained this idea . . .” (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:7).

It is difficult to understand the words of the Ravad. Does the verse not clearly state, “You saw no image” (besides other such statements)? (Cf. the *Kesef Mishnah*’s question *ibid.*)

But in line with what was stated above, we can understand this as follows. The Ravad is not saying that we should delude ourselves that there is some image in the upper realm, God forbid, let it not even be uttered. Rather, we must know in truth that God has no image, heaven forbid. But we beings scraped of physicality, corporeal people who possess form, visualize such a thing so that our mindfulness will be able to grasp, expand and broaden.

Then, when God helps us and our mind grows stronger so that we can think of Him with a strong and clean mindfulness, and when an image of a spark of prophecy is revealed within us, this physical image will of itself cease to exist. When we pray, we will be able to picture that we are standing before God and His throne of glory—realizing that whatever we imagine is merely the way that our

senses—our ears and mind—are capable of interpreting things¹.

And so, member of this group, if you find yourself in such an extremity, visualize that you are standing before God's Throne of Glory and that you are praying and begging Him simply, like a son crying and begging before his father, "Have mercy on me, my Father, I can no longer bear the wanderings of my body and the abandonment of my spirit. From the time that you cast me from You and hid Your face from me, I am surrounded by terror."

Who is the person, even if has a heart of stone, who will not melt when he pictures that he is standing before God's Throne of Glory, a consuming fire, pleading for himself, his family, and all Israel?

♥ Eight: Thought and Feeling

There are two things that we vitally need, yet both of which we lack. One is that our mindfulness, our meditative awareness, will be broadened and improved; the other is that we will experience inspiration and emotion. In truth, these two are one.

If a person is suffering (heaven forbid), when he prays to God, he does not feel any lack of imagery or concentration. Similarly, a Jew who is aflame on the Days of Awe does not he lack attentiveness. When he is on fire and inspired, he does not entertain any this-worldly thoughts. Instead, all that he has in mind, all that he feels, is in accord with his situation, with his spiritual passion. He sees the Throne of

¹More literally: "but merely in a manner that consciously supplies our ear and mind with that which they are capable of comprehending."

Glory brought all the way down to his level and that he now stands before God; and deeply moved, he praises God. He is not praising and lauding some king hidden from him, thousands of miles away, but God Who is right before his eyes. He quotes the verse, “Yours, Hashem, is the greatness and the might” (*Divrei Hayamim*), and then he prays, “My Father, compassionate Father, help me in all that I need,” and he enumerates his needs.

Later, he can no longer comprehend the state of the thoughts he had had when he had been aflame. For one thing, since that thought had been so filled with pain, it was like the smallest part of his fiery inspiration². Secondly, the only tool he possesses to comprehend that thought is everyday, physical thought. But physical thought can only analyze physical thought, composed of form and image.

The emotional arousal and impassioned state that any Jew experiences is actually a species of revelation of his spirit, independent of his body. So why toil in vain trying to understand it by using physical thought?

Pure mindfulness depends upon inspiration and fiery enthusiasm; and fiery enthusiasm depends upon pure mindfulness. If you could soften your heart so that you were always filled with spiritual passion, your mindfulness would be more pure. If you possessed pure mindfulness, you would be able to attain a state of fiery awakening whenever you choose.

And so in order to serve God, a Jew needs both of these: to expand his thought and to be able to feel passionately.

Therefore, we must discuss not only how to broaden

²Phrase unclear.

meditative thought, but also how to arouse the flame of the heart. Let us seek out ideas and strategies, and may God enlighten our eyes and help us so that in the end we will be able to raise ourselves from the muck (in which we are plunged) that now envelops us up to our necks.

If we are unable to begin our spiritual journey by awakening holiness directly, let us fall back on our approach of descending to the lowest point of a person's physical self and raising him from there. Let us begin with a physical awakening, because (as stated earlier) every awakening—even if it is only physical—is a key to our soul.

Imagine if person's son were arrested and imprisoned, and he can only visit his son when the warden enters the cell to interrogate him. Since the cell was opened only for the purpose of the criminal investigation, a foolish father will only speak with his son about the case. But a wise father will reason, "True, it is the warden who has opened the cell door. But since it *is* open and my son stands before me, I will embrace him, kiss him, and speak to him as a loving father."

Every feeling that is connected to something of this world opens a spark of our soul, and our soul is revealed a little bit. Let us then consciously draw it out even more. Let us greet it with words of love, awe and pure, God-directed mindfulness. Since this feeling based on physicality has opened and revealed our soul a bit, we have something to begin with. We can now knock upon the door of our heart and summon our soul from behind the gates of bronze, where it stands imprisoned. "Open for me, my sister, my friend" (Song of Songs). "Come forth to serve God with purity and passion, with faith, love and awe."

For example, we all have worries about something in our own life or about someone who is deeply important to us. When we bring these troubles to mind and imagine them vividly, as though they stand before our eyes, our heart melts with emotion, and inside, we even weep.

Bring these thoughts up deliberately. And when your heart is aroused and broken, consider: “Why should I break my heart and weep for nothing? Isn’t God before me? I am standing before the Throne of His Glory. And so I will cry to God, Who hears the sound of weeping.”

Then, utilizing the advice of the Ravad regarding thought and image (as taught previously), realize strongly that you have ascended and are standing before the Throne of Glory, before God, where you have been given the opportunity to pray and plead. Then you will see what meaningful prayer you will experience as a result of this visualization.

If thinking about some past concern doesn’t awaken your spirit, then follow the advice of the Talmud: “recall the day of your death.”

The Talmud says that even the wicked know that they will die. So why do they remain wicked? Because they only know this in a general way. It is only a general idea that does not break their heart with vivid detail.

So imagine that you have reached that event, one that every individual finally comes to after living his length of days and years. Imagine that you have reached your last minute on earth; imagine how you will look at the entire world and at your children, from whom you

must part. Your body will go beneath the earth with the insects and the worms. And your soul will be led on a path whose destination you do not know.

Your children will surround you, weeping and crying out, “Woe, my dear father, my dear father!”

Your friends and family will moan and call to you.

As for you, you will hear and understand everything, but will be unable to do a thing. You will yearn and plead to live, but your heart will beat so violently that it will almost burst. Your throat will choke so that you will be about to suffocate. And then your soul will be ripped your throat and heart.

And as you are being brought to the cemetery, your son will beat his head and wail and cry, “My father, my dear father, have you left us? Are you torn away from us forever?”

Your daughter will throw herself to the ground. She will shriek bitterly and wail, “I cannot live without you, my father. If only I could die instead of you!” Tears will stream from her eyes and wails will burst from her throat until it will seem that her suffering and wails will kill her.

These, your children’s voices, will cause everyone, the living and the dead, to tremble. And the others there will also moan and sob—in pity for you and for them. You will be surrounded by outcries, distress and misery.

In the end, everyone will go home. But where will you be, and with whom will you be left alone?

If you learn *Reishis Chochmah*, Zohar and the midrashim on what happens to a person and his soul after he dies, even if you have a heart of stone, it will certainly melt.

Now, having immersed yourself in these bitter feelings, you will ascend to a worthy prayer, one that does not lack feeling, thought, faith, love or awe of God.

🕊️ **Nine: Feeling in Prayer**

Why is a person's soul hidden, sleeping as if forever? Why can't it gain strength through a meditative state, an awakening of holiness? It appears to me that this is so because a person's prayer and spiritual awakening occur as two separate incidents. Many times, even though he prays, he is not ready to awaken spiritually. And when he has a momentary flash of awakening, it is not the time for prayer. As a result, his soul has grown accustomed to a groggy sleep, and he cannot come to a state of pure mindfulness. Instead, he can only use his mind for physical things: what he will eat and what he will drink, and visualizing various physical things.

We must employ all sorts of stratagems so that our prayer will be inspired. On the other hand, we should not lose any bit of inspiration that occurs in the midst of our day, when we are not at prayer. Use such an occurrence as a key to your soul. As was said before, every type of emotion—even if it is triggered by business and other such this-worldly things, whether it is a broken heart or joy, contains something of a revelation of the soul, although covered in the garment of this-worldly needs. Take advantage of this propitious moment. If you feel any sort of broken-heartedness, even for physical concerns, immediately go off to the side and recite a few chapters of Psalms. Ideally, recite a chapter that is relevant to you at this moment.

For instance, if you have to deal with enemies, recite Chapter Five: “How many are my enemies, many rise up against me . . .” If you have some other difficulty, recite, “I have sunken into the muddy swamp” (*Tehillim* 6:1) or “I will lift my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come?” (ibid. 121:1).

Don’t abruptly stop what you are doing and begin reciting words mechanically. First think about what is upsetting you, these problems that are frustrating you and causing you so much suffering. To whom will you go and who will save you, if not the Holy One, blessed be He, the Omnipotent One, the Father of compassion? And now you are approaching the Throne of Glory, and in your mind you imagine God’s glory: that you are standing before Him and pleading, “Hashem, how many are my enemies . . . many say, he will not be saved by God”—that is what they say—“but You, Hashem, are my shield . . .” (*Tehillim* 3:3).

After you finish reciting this chapter of Psalms, pray in your own words, with words that arise spontaneously within you. As you proceed from phrase to phrase and from word to word, feel that your mind and thought are growing stronger and rising, and that little by little you are leaving the needs of your body behind. And now an outcry bursts forth from the depths of your heart: “Master of the world, bring me before You. Purify me, raise me above all these worries, so that I can be close to You with a pure heart and soul.” And then, when you have finished praying, recite a verse of encouragement, such as, “Hashem is my Shepherd, I shall not lack . . . I will not fear evil, for—Master of the world—You are with me” (*Tehillim* 23). And now rejoice that God is with you, for God truly is with you—particularly now, when you have poured your heart out to

Him in a moment of elevation and closeness to Him. Then, for the rest of the day, be aware of a kind of spiritual pleasure, a pleasure of purity, for today your soul was in the Garden of Eden—and what can compare to it and its joy?

Also, when you feel joyful, even if this joy is the result of having been helped out of some this-worldly problem, don't ignore this propitious moment when the spark of the revelation of your soul has been struck. Stand to the side and recite some chapters of Psalms (just a few, not too many), such as Chapter Eighteen: "Hashem, my might, strengthen me . . . my Rock, I will take refuge in Him; my shield and horn of my salvation, my tower . . ." When you finish reciting Psalms, say aloud, "Master of the universe, thank You for Your great kindness, for taking care of me, for helping me in Your great compassion, for always guiding me for my own good—and in particular now that You have saved me in this way." Feel how this physical joy has brought you to an elevated state in which you can rejoice in God.

When you undertake this practice, you won't ignore even a sigh, because even with a simple, slight sigh about this-worldly matters, a sigh that comes from your heart, the heart of a Jew, you can attain a great revelation of your soul and bring it close to God. Your soul is like a sealed spring that you must search for. You must drill holes and cracks into it. And from every hole, you can bring forth a profusion of water, with which you can water your own fields and those of others as well.

Besides that, reciting these prayers and feeling this breadth of emotion is in itself good. These two things are cleansing baths that

purify the Jewish soul from every polluted desire and bring it close to God. Also, they do not allow the soul to slumber lethargically and fall faint. Instead, they accustom your soul to be more and more revealed. Then these two grow stronger: your spiritual passion and your imageless mindfulness. And it grows easier to arouse your soul to attain inspiration and passion at any time.

☪ Ten: See God in Everything

But do not forget the basic purpose of our “Society for Positive Mindfulness.” It does not suffice to have experiences of spiritual inspiration triggered by the things of this world. Ultimately, inspired thoughts of this nature have a physical form. This is because when you have a thought, you must picture an image that is almost physical. (Cf. the opinion of the Ravad, *ibid.*). Also, in order to gain inspiration, you have to imagine this-worldly problems and your day of death.

But is a person who needs this really called a spiritual person and a thinker?

No, he is not. Our desire is to tear aside in one motion the entire curtain spread across the totality of life. Then, in an instant you will see yourself standing before God’s glory in the midst of a great camp of angels and seraphim—and you being one of them.

Up to this point, the advice I have given has only presented a means by which you may come to a true intent and rise level after level. The goal is that there will manifest in you passion and an imageless thought, the expansion of a thought that is so strong and

clean that you will see God in everything. Instead of your senses forcing your thoughts to apprehend a sensory form according to their nature, the opposite will occur: your mind will contemplate a clear thought (the essence of thought without form and image), and this will overwhelm your senses, penetrating deeply into them and there being manifested by them in the world. Finally, all of your thought's communication and contact with the world will occur without the veil of your senses. Your thought will function directly through the vehicles of your eyes, ears, and so forth. These organs will be no more than transmitters of your thought.

This is not to say that I intend to entirely wipe out your physical senses so that you will not apprehend the world in front of you. You *will* see the world, but you will also see God's holiness resting upon it (whether or not you are looking at it). And this is not to say that you will merely contemplate that God rests upon the world and that He rules over everything. We have already spoken about the fact that our mind alone does not really bring us close to God. By analogy, what good would it do you to close your eyes and gaze at an image of clouds? Will clouds really descend upon you in consequence?

Rather, there will be revealed within you a new type of thought that you have not known before, although it already exists within you, and with it you will see everything.

We are not telling you fantasies, nor are we speaking of matters that so transcend the world and nature that only elevated personalities can reach them. These are things that every Jew can assuredly and certainly attain with a little effort—as long as that effort is constant. These matters do not conflict with nature.

If it is hard for you at this point to understand how you will be

able to arrive at a state that neither you nor your friends could ever have imagined, do not despair. Know this rule: never despair of reaching any great level and elevated trait that you have heard about. Rather, desire these things in your heart and work hard to reach them.

Many people have been lost, not rising to the state that they were capable of reaching, only because they surrendered out of laziness, sloppiness and the prompting of their evil inclination. If they had only wanted to try to act and rise little by little, step by step, they would not have wasted all their days in rubbish, they would not have destroyed all the light and holiness that was prepared for them.

And so do not content yourself with reading through this little book. Instead, learn it slowly. And do not go through it all at one sitting. Rather, pause at the end of each section. And it is preferable that you take a few days to go through it, reading a little each day. Then, after you have finished, learn it a second time, then a third time, and so forth.

When you read this work carefully and review it, endeavor to become aware of its overall form. All of a person's life force cannot appear in one limb only. It appears in his 248 limbs. And only when you look at all of them together can you recognize his complete form. In the same way, this book consists of teachings, inspirational advice and practical ideas. When you look at only one part, you only see one limb of its intent. In your heart and soul, you must solder together everything in this book. Then the form of this particular service of God with its particular goal will become evident.

But this will only be the experience of those who have already been described at the beginning of this work in regard to membership

in our fellowship.

🕯️ **Eleven: Strengthening Holy Feeling**

We have many feelings that flow in a weak and shallow manner. If we broaden such a feeling and bring it to full being, it will turn into a great river whose waters and tributaries will never run dry.

If we do not expand these feelings, they will disappear without ever having seen the light of day.

For instance, sometimes a person feels an inner discomfort. He doesn't know whether he needs to eat or sleep or have a drink. Then this feeling dissipates. But really what he felt was his soul stretching forth a limb, desiring to have the joy of experiencing of a pure thought.

Sometimes a person has a feeling of joy or the like. Since this feeling is not contained within a physical container (because it is a limb extended by his pure soul), he doesn't know what it is and what he is feeling. His soul is knocking softly and fluttering, but he drinks a vodka or does some other this-worldly act. This does not calm the movements of his soul. He has only diverted and aroused his physical feelings to roar and thunder. But he did not hear the voice of his soul.

In the same way, the priests of Moloch, who practiced child sacrifice, would beat on drums so that a father would not hear his son wailing amidst the flames. A person's physical feelings are so loud that the quaking of his soul passes unnoticed and in vain. It is as though his soul suffered a miscarriage.

Regarding this, our society proclaims to each member: Know

how to look. Know how to look at everything that is occurring within you and outside of you. “Looking” does not only refer to seeing some object. It is rather a type of birth. We give birth to and bring forth something that we look at. We bring forth and give birth to its form until it becomes something that we can gaze upon.

When you have a feeling, you must look. You must bring forth a form of the feeling, and look at that form.

Sometimes minor feelings flit through a person and are lost because he is unable to look at them. But more than that, entire mitzvot flash by him, returning to where they came from. He can feel what was within him, but he is incapable of focusing, imaging and knowing what he felt. For instance, he cannot tell how his feelings on the eve of Yom Kipper differ from those of Rosh Hashanah or from those on the eve of Passover, and so forth.

Therefore, I advise you: Teach yourself to look.

In general, be the kind of person who seeks God everywhere. Perhaps you will find God, Who hides Himself and the holiness of His glory. When you seek Him, you will find Him.

And where will you find Him? In yourself and in everything around you.

To attain this end, you must abjure haste, for a hasty person cannot come to understanding. On the other hand, be careful that your deliberation does not lead to the opposite: to lethargy and depression.

Let us take an instance of composed mindfulness: *Shalosh Seudos*, the third Sabbath meal.

You are sitting *Shalosh Seudos*, on the Sabbath in the company of Hasidim. Don't you feel anything? The *tzaddikim* say that

an hour of *Shalosh Seudos* is like the hour of which it is said, “Better an hour of *teshuvah* and goods deeds in this world than the entire life of the world-to-come” (*Berachot* 48a). My holy father-in-law said in the name of the Maggid of Koznitz that *Shalosh Seudos* has the quality of “the righteous sitting with crowns on their heads enjoying the radiance of God's Presence” (*Pinchas, Zohar* 258a. And you don't feel a thing? An experience greater than the world-to-come is passing over you—yet you feel nothing!

No doubt your laziness entices you again, saying, “Stop trying to be what you are not.” But I have already told you that this is the response of the evil inclination within you. The Almighty rules over everything; and if the righteous feel and enjoy His holiness in a developed way (corresponding to the head), you can at least do so in an undeveloped way (corresponding to the heel).

No doubt you also feel something at *Shalosh Seudos*. Your heart and mind are tossing to and fro from the mighty sound of the wheels: the wheels of the divine chariot that are passing through your soul. But you are not able to comprehend and see, and the sound and roar are lost to you, so that you barely realize that the Almighty accompanied by all His host has come.

Everyone has to learn how to see, on his level. During *Shalosh Seudos*, it is very simple. The Sabbath has passed, a day of holiness. The heavens have been sanctified and you too have sanctified yourself. You haven't involved yourself in business, nor wasted time in idle chatter. You have sat and meditated on your Creator, and with friends you have learned Torah or conversed in matters of holiness. You have cleansed yourself from the week's every stain and speck of dust, and you have made an attempt to become attuned to your soul, as you

weren't during the week. At every stage you have felt as if you were elevating yourself from one level of holiness to another, until you reached *Shalosh Seudos*, the pinnacle: the desire of desires.

Now you feel that this is neither the time nor place to eat meat and fish, but to search for God, Who hides in the crevices of glory, and to take pleasure in His radiance. You sit with your friends, who also seek God.

And you sit in darkness. This custom of Israel is Torah, because it is fitting that the body reflect the state of the soul at this moment. There are two types of darkness. There is what we see as darkness because it is beyond our ability to sense. From God's perspective, that true light. And then there is the darkness that comes only from this world.

Neither the world nor its affairs appear any longer. And since for a full twenty-four hours you have distanced yourself from this world and step by step drawn closer to the desire of desires, which is God's will, your mind, soul and the senses of your body force you to physically sit in darkness.

Your heart and eyes no longer see the world or worldly matters. God is hiding in darkness. After searching and examining throughout *Shabbos*, you have come to the thick cloud where God is. You have sought, and you have found the beloved of your soul. Your soul draws near to Him and melts in His holiness. The whole room is full of the celestial palace, and you force yourself through this holy palace to the Holy of Holies, your soul longing to enter the innermost chamber to come to the place where God is: to hold Him and not let Him go.

And if you were to know that you were to remain in this state

constantly, then your soul would be joyful with an eternal joy. But you remember that in a minute the lights will be lit, you will make *Havdalah*, and again you will fall into the weekdays. Your spirit is bitter: how will you fall from the darkness of heaven, the clouds of purity, to the darkness of Egypt, the darkness of suffering: the suffering of the body and the soul together? You tremble and feel, now you feel them both: the end of days and the end of the week, the heights of the peak of holiness and the nadir of the lowliness of the non-holy. These two shades of darkness now wrestle within you at *Shalosh Seudos*.

This can be compared to the son of a king who was sent away from his father and thrown into prison. At the last moment before he is separated from his father, he draws himself even closer, he pushes forward and comes close, grasps him and embraces him, takes delight in him and yearns for him. In the midst of its delight and fear, the spirit cries out from the depths, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil, for You are with me” (*Tehillim*). Your hands are practically trembling and searching: “You are with me” (*ibid.*), “I have grasped him and I will not let him go” (*Shir Hashirim*).

Look and contemplate. All of this is passing through your spirit—but you have not contemplated it and you do not know it.

Is it possible that such a state of the spirit will not leave its impression on the entire week?

In truth, in itself this means of contemplation should be sufficient for you. If you contemplate and look at all the feelings that pass through you, you will gaze at all the angels of the heights, as well as high levels and stages that are passing through the path of your

heart and soul. This will suffice for you to rise and to be transformed into a man of the spirit and a person of pure consciousness. Elevated thought will be revealed within you so that you will see only holiness, spirit and the glory of God that fills all the earth.

But a Jew has many other senses and capabilities, and he must develop all of them for the sake of God. He has to embrace God with all the limbs of his spirit. And so we will speak further on (God willing) of the obligations and actions of the members of the Society for Positive Mindfulness.

❖ Twelve: The Spiritual Nature of Reality

I know quite well that your heart is still doubtful. You believe somewhat, but then you doubt that you could reach a state from which you will see spirit and holiness in the entire world: that you will not merely understand conceptually, but that you will actually perceive holiness, souls and holy Names.

You protest, “In truth, don’t I see a world that is physical? Who can deny the certainty of my senses, such as my sight and hearing?”

But what makes you so sure that your senses are telling you the truth? It is not my intent to enter into disputations. But it will be worthwhile to do so in order to shake your mind free of its assurance regarding your senses, which you trust even as you reject any possibility of a non-sensory perception of tangible objects.

Therefore, allow me to ask you a simple question: What is water?

You are sure that when you look at water and feel it, you are seeing and feeling the actual water, not merely some image of water. But if you are perceiving the essence of water, how is it that it changes form, transforming itself into snow, ice and mist, and then back again to water?

Or let us take straw. Straw is gathered and becomes fertilizer. It is spread in the field, where it improves the grain—meaning that it is absorbed into the grain. After this, a person eats the grain and it turns into his flesh and blood. But what are these things intrinsically: the water, straw, grain and flesh? How does one essence turn into another, then into a third, and then return to itself? You might argue that many elements exist within one element. But that is neither possible nor true.

The essence of each one of these things is invisible to you. You see merely transient shapes and states of being. Your senses have led you astray and falsely led you to believe that the world we see and feel stands clearly before us, constituting the essence of reality. But our senses cannot reach this essence. Instead, like a blind man, we grope along the outer forms that envelop the hidden essence.

This being the case, why should it be difficult for you to accept that the Kabbalist perceives the essence of true being within all things of the world as divine Names and souls? By what authority do you reject his vision with your own misleading senses, challenging him that you see only a physical world? If in truth there is no water and no straw, then there is likewise no world and no essence before you.

When I say that the Kabbalist perceives the essence of the world in the form of divine Names and souls, I am speaking about a Kabbalist who is a Hasid. What differentiates him from a person who

is merely a Kabbalist?

Once a Hasid has learned to meditate and has developed an elevated sight with which he sees the entire world as souls and spirit, then he learns Kabbalah in order to ascertain the states of these souls and their names in the world, what categories they belong to and how they devolved, each according to its type.

For instance, he has already seen the souls of bread. Now he learns that its essence consists of the three divine names, “*Havayah*” (as is known).

This is not the case with someone who is not a Hasid, but rather a dry person with dry senses. When he comes to learn Kabbalah, he arouses only confusion and contradictions within himself. He sees physical bread that a person eats and is satiated with, and reads in Kabbalah sources that it is called by three names of “*Havayah*,” indicating that it devolved from that level of reality—i.e., that this supernal state of being devolved and coalesced before his eyes.

And he questions this: This is just bread. How did it change from a level of non-physicality to become physical? At best, he answers that the masters of Kabbalah are merely alluding to the divine Names by associating them with bread. But why did they connect the name of the King with a lowly, trivial thing? And the whole matter remains a problem and contradiction for him.

The goal of our holy group is that you will be transformed into a person of spirit and thought—and not merely thought, but pure, intense thought. Conquer your senses, and a new, holy sense will become manifest to you. When you recite the beginning of a blessing, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the world,” you will see the “You” and the “King of the world.” Your eyes will of themselves open wide to see the King Who embraces the entire world and you. They will gaze at and pierce all of the world that separates us from the “You,” the “King” Who surrounds it. Your eyes will grow powerful and gaze, and you will see God Who fills the world, so that He is before you: “You are King of the world.” You will experience delight, and you will melt.

Why doubt this, why be skeptical about this sense that will become manifest within you? Trust God that you can analyze and understand this. A physical sense, like your sense of smell—can you understand it? Couldn’t someone without a sense of smell ask, “If someone hasn’t tasted or touched it, how can he distinguish between spices and mustard? And what pleasure does he derive from spices and myrtle?” And you will not have a ready answer. You only know that you have this sense, and this is its nature, although you do not know how to think into it.

In addition, do not object that I am trying to make a prophet out of you, after the age of prophecy has ceased (for our many sins). In regard to this, Hillel the Elder said of every Jew, “Although they are not prophets, they are the children of prophets” (*Pesachim* 66b). And in regard to the prophets themselves, we see that although God told Moshe, “no man shall see Me” (*Shemot* 23:20), Isaiah and Ezekiel both said, “I saw God” (*Yishaya* 6:1). There are many levels.

That which Moshe wanted to see cannot be seen by any living person. But Isaiah and Ezekiel saw a lower level. And a much lower level, extending far down, remains for you, the offspring of prophets, to see.

Besides this, do not be dismayed at yourself and ask, “I am a sinful, lowly person. How can it be possible for me to see the ‘You, King of the world,’ even on the lowest level?” I am very cognizant of your situation. Yet I am nevertheless certain—certain in God and in the holiness of Israel within you—that you will see this if you are one of the people whom we described in the chapter that delineates the nature of the group (conditions one, two, three, four and five).

to review:

1. He must be a person who truly feels pain and sorrow at his distance from God. He not only recognizes his low state intellectually—which everyone realizes this intellectually, unless he is insane or drunk—but in his heart he truly feels the pain because of an embittered soul. This causes him no less concern than do his physical problems. Not only that, at times this weighs so heavily upon him that he cries over the sufferings of his soul and the lowness of his being.
2. He must be a *ben Torah*, dedicated to learning and keeping Torah—to a greater or lesser extent.
3. Be he a merchant, craftsman, or whatever, he must meet with the group at least three times a week. And he must meticulously adhere to the group regulations, which will be described further on, God willing.
4. He must not be inconstant by nature, impetuously coming to a decision one day and forgetting about it the next, casually trampling upon his commitments and “overturning the pot.”
5. He must not be a liar, a dissembler immersed in his own

falsehoods.]

Even if you do not experience this vision at all times, you will at any rate do so many times. At such instances, you will literally rise from the lusts and ugliness associated with your body. You will be purified and sanctified. Even if you fall back at times to your previous coarseness (heaven forbid), you will again stand and rise, with the help of God.

♥ Fourteen: Bringing Ourselves to Perceive Godliness

But even before this elevated sight truly manifests within you, so that you actually see the entire world as divinity, as divine Names and souls, every day contemplate the following: “I only see the glory of God that fills the world, a world that He created from divinity. I too am filled with divinity. Even the grains of sand upon which I walk are holy Names. The entire world is swallowed up and totally absorbed in the holiness of God’s Divinity. Only I, with my individual will, have taken myself out of this, to become a being who exists independently and far from God, wandering outside this Godly camp.”

Engage in this thought at length. Consider it constantly and impress it upon your mind. Ultimately you will come under its sway. The Rambam teaches that if a man refuses to give his wife divorce papers, the court coerces him until he agrees to do so. But, since his assent must be given freely, how does coercion help? The answer is that although his acquiescence was forced out of him, it does reflect his will, because the soul of a Jew wants to perform God’s command. The problem is that he is prevented from doing so by his outer being,

his body. Once this outer being, his body, is subjugated, his soul emerges from its imprisonment and it agrees.

Similarly, you can coerce yourself. When you consider repeatedly that the entire world is filled with Divine Names, and you implant this thought permanently in your heart and mind, this coercion will without a doubt cause your soul to manifest with its holy vision. The reason is that the soul already experiences such holy vision, but the body impedes it. Since you are now subjugating your physicality, your soul comes forth exercising its vision. Although this may not always happen, you will at any rate have good hours and minutes of such experiences. And, as the sages have said, “One hour [of returning to God] in this world is better than the pleasure of the entire world to come” (source).

Even when you are not illuminated and your soul is unable to gather strength and gaze with this capability, constantly contemplating this thought can still help you a great deal. When you look at the world and consider, “All things are surrounded by God’s holiness, of their own will nullifying themselves before God, all things are divine names and souls—and only I, an arrogant creature, have separated myself and left the camp of God’s Presence,” you will grow concerned about your situation. You will indeed start wondering why you are standing outside God’s domain.

As you continuously immerse yourself in this thought and in a complete faith that there is nothing but God and that everything—except for you—is divinity, your concern will increase so much that you will come to despise this life of yours and the spirit of confusion that fills your life with despair and error. This concern will spread throughout your heart, limbs, thought, and even your actions.

You will be oppressed by a broken heart and heaviness until you will constantly envy the camp of God—from the highest world of Emanation to the lowest world of Action. You will think, “Even the passage and flow of a rivulet is divine service and is wrapped up within the will of God. I alone have left all this and grown distant.”

Particularly, when you will sense some low thought or desire within yourself (heaven forbid), and you will know that you are once again being cast thousands of miles from the border of holiness, a groan will break forth from your lips: “Woe, Master of the universe, at least do not let me be cast away from you to the lowest depths.” Only then will you understand how true are the words of our sages that “it would have been better if man had not been created” (*Eirubin* 13a). What is a person’s sole reality after he has been created, and he passes through this world like a traveler lodging overnight, like a passing shadow? It is that he has been cast out of the camp of God’s Presence. Who knows if he will be able to return and dwell next to God? How much better if he had not been created, but had remained absorbed and hidden within God’s holiness, totally nullified to God, in the upper world.

You will literally be seized by the wish that you had never been created. And when you recite *Shema* and visualize that you are ready to sacrifice your life for God, this constant wish that unceasingly afflicts you in the hidden part of your heart will be aroused: “How I wish I could be freed of all these matters, and I were once again one of the limbs of the King (so to speak).” Your yearning and thought will grow so intense that it will seem that you are actually undergoing this test, and that you are joyfully leaping into the flames to the Infinite One—so much so that at times your body will tremble.

Let us not deceive ourselves that we will immediately reach the level of Rabbi Akiva, who was glad to meet martyrdom, saying, “Throughout my entire life, I worried about when I would be able to fulfill the command to love God ‘with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might’” (*Berachot* 61b). Simply put, Rabbi Akiva desired to be afflicted and tormented. In fact, he suffered because until this point his flesh was not burning and combed for the sake of God’s Name.

Although we have not yet arrived at this point, we at any rate yearn for God, and our descent into the world of illusion in such a lowly manner, so distant from God, is repugnant to us. Every Jew must bear in mind that he is a Jew like all Israel—and that he would prefer to be killed rather than not be a Jew. And so if he were to be tested, he would be prepared to give his life for God. And since now, at the time of reciting the *Shema*, he visualizes that he is facing this test (cf. the “Little Letter” of R. Elimelech of Lizhensk), his yearning is automatically awakened, and he proclaims, “Were I to be martyred now, it would be fine with me, for I would arrive at the goal of my desire. How good and how pleasant it would be, like the heavenly true good and supernal pleasantness.”

This feeling of self-sacrifice while reciting *Shema* is not merely an empty thought that does not satisfy the soul, just as a thought of eating does not satisfy the body. This is actual self-sacrifice. A person casts away his life until his entire yearning is fulfilled, until his entire body is affected by this, and both his body and soul are purified.

Our goal, the goal of our group, is to perfect thought, to bring it forth, expand it and intensify it. This constitutes not merely a manifestation of thought, but a manifestation of our soul, a manifestation of our soul and its command over our body. If you train yourself in this consistently, you will be able to rise from level to level to regions that you never imagined and had never even hoped for. What does a person lack when his soul is leading the way, drawing his entire body after it to its height, its zenith and nesting place?

And so, since the goal of our service and hope is the manifestation of our soul, we must act in all our affairs in ways that will help our soul manifest itself. And we must guard against those things that drive it away and cause it to be concealed within the pit, the great depth that exists within every human being.

In all that you do, act simply and wholeheartedly. When you are wholehearted, this indicates that you and your activities are ruled by your soul. Contrarily, guile indicates a lack of soul. In such a state, a person is governed by reasoning: not the reasoning that comes from the soul, but the reasoning of the world—the reasoning that governs its customs, states of being and indeed its people, all of which fools consider to be “intelligence,” and in accordance with which they act, speak, think and engage in their affairs.

Guile refers not only to falsehood, but even to the beginning of falsehood, to that which brings a person to speak and think falsehood: a decayed state of the soul that brings a person to become such a liar that ultimately his thoughts, words and all his affairs are convoluted—not alive, not in existence, not true.

The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is “Truth” (source).

This seal is stamped upon the entire world.

A growing plant contains within itself the existence of the life-force of its sprouting soul. That is truth.

On the other hand, an imagined plant or a wax representation of a plant is falsehood. Truth is reality, and falsehood is a nonexistent nothingness.

Truth is in the category of life, and falsehood exists on the side of death, without a core, with no existence and no reality.

Reality is truth. When all of a person's affairs, actions and thoughts contain a reality in which his soul is found, that is truth and wholeheartedness.

Plant life sprouts with wholeheartedness and simplicity, with no external intent and motive, but only because of the reality within it and because of its soul that presses it to spread and grow.

Similarly, in all his affairs a child acts with simplicity and wholeheartedness, in accordance with the existence of his soul as it spreads forth. Were an adult also to act in all his affairs and engage in all his thoughts with his soul only, he would be wholehearted and truthful. But as long as he does not act with simplicity, in accordance with that which flows from his heart and soul, there is no reality in him and in all his actions. He is already falsehood itself, even if he does not say that a tree is a stone. And if someone does claim that a tree is a stone, the basis and beginning of that falsehood actually began much earlier, coming from something rooted in the Side of Death, and there is no reality or soul in any of his acts and thoughts.

The entire charm of a child is that he is wholehearted and simple. When we speak with him, we feel as though we are speaking with his soul. When we ask him a question, it penetrates to his soul,

and from his soul comes a reply that is wholehearted and simple. The child puts his entire heart into his response.

I am not asking you to give up your awareness in order to be like a child, but only that you be wholehearted.

For instance, when someone asks you a question, don't think about how to answer him: "Etiquette demands that I answer him in such-and-such a way; if I answer him in this other way, he will think that I am intelligent; if I wish to fool and deceive him, I should tell him the following." If you do this, your answer is a gathering of wind from the four corners of the earth. You may have answered in such a way that you fulfill the requirements of etiquette and you had assured that he considers you intelligent, and so forth. But you and your soul are lacking. There is neither reality nor life force, neither soul nor truth here. Instead, there is falsehood, nothingness and emptiness.

Rather, respond sincerely. Speak from your heart, with wholeheartedness and simplicity. Use your reasoning only to establish that you aren't making a mistake. This reasoning of yours should also be simple and sincere. It should serve as a type of tool helping the sincerity and simplicity of your heart and bringing it forth into action.

If responding in such a way would harm you or would involve some other problem, simply reply, "I do not know" (as our sages advise us [*Berachot* 4a]). Do not twist and bend things to produce a guileful response that lacks sincerity and simplicity.

There are many obstacles that keep a person from being wholehearted and sincere. For instance, there is a type of false humility whereby a person is so intimidated by society and its mores, he so deeply values the ways of the world and the opinions of others

that he prostrates himself before them entirely. The entire essence of his heart and soul are as nothing; they are crushed and not in the least manifest. He is so “civilized” by the manners of the world that he loses the ability to sense what is good and what is evil, what he should do and what he should avoid doing. He measures all good and evil by the yardstick of the world. That which the world considers good, he considers good, and if something is reviled, then he will revile it as well.

Imagine what it would be like if you were the only person in the world, and none of what you did was for the sake of anyone else or for any ulterior motive. You would certainly not truckle before the laws, conventions and foolish things of the world. Your sole purpose would be to discharge your obligations.

And so maintain this viewpoint. Even when you do someone else a favor, do so solely to fulfill your obligation, solely because you have a responsibility to help other people—not for any superficial design and purpose. Feel yourself impelled by a type of inner drive telling you, “This is your obligation, this is what you must do.”

If you accustom yourself to always act this way, then your heart, soul, independent will, and sense of its obligation in all things will grow manifest. All your actions, thoughts and speech will be filled with your soul and its power, spreading throughout you and saying, “Grow, act, and be a constant servant of Hashem your God in all your affairs.”

There is yet another fundamental, natural impediment that keeps a person from simplicity, that ruins him and turns him into an insincere dissembler, a man who lacks heart and soul. It is a mental disease, something that has twisted his mind so that it cannot think straight, but is askew, tangled and confused.

Like a person with a nervous condition, this person cannot think straight. His mind has grown so incoherent and confused that he cannot think simply. This is a type of insanity, a mental illness and affliction (heaven have mercy).

Usually, just as one can discern whether a person is mentally ill (to whatever degree), one can tell a person like this, a liar, by his face and eyes.

The Talmud gives the reason for this condition: “idleness leads to uneasiness” (source). Although a person suffering from a malady of this type speaks rationally, his consciousness has grown so confused and entangled, one thought conflicting with another, that there is nothing fundamental and no truth.

This is why—as a rule—the greatest liars are those who are idle. Contrarily, a person who must engage in mental work or who engages in difficult physical labor (which also suppresses his mental activity, cf. section four above), typically is not deceptive. In other words, this malady of uneasiness and confusion has not affected his mind.

What is a true healing regimen?

The answer is: do not be complicated, but simple. Avoid idleness as much as you can. And do not imagine that it will suffice to avoid idleness for three or four hours. The evil inclination is a thief: he is content to make you idle for minutes, then ten minutes more, and then another ten minutes, until—for the remainder of the day—all of

your thoughts will be confused.

Idleness is like a rot that spreads to everything it touches, destroying and ruining that which was healthy.

❖ **Seventeen: Beyond the Intellect of This World**

I realize that a person may be so used to overvaluing human knowledge and intellect that it will be difficult for him to understand my demand for so much simplicity and guilelessness, and he may imagine that I want him to become a fool.

But a person who raises this objection has not understood my intent. It is possible that the venom injected into mankind by the sin of Adam is causing him to consider the opinions of the world as good (in particular, its outlook on good and evil, an outlook that results from a lack of clarity and from an inability to choose between the two polarities of good and evil). He honors and worships the world's outlook, and imagines simplicity to be boorish and foolish.

Yet Yaacov is praised as a “simple man” (*Breishit* 25:27), and we are directed to be “simple with Hashem your God” (*Devorim* 18:13)—that same God Who is the source of wisdom, and one of Whose titles is “Wise.” This is true wisdom, pure wisdom. A wisdom that is simple and direct possesses a certainty.

Even by simply using our human intellect, we can understand to some degree why we should not assign so much importance to and be so impressed by human intelligence and all of its new creations. At the most, we should be astonished at human ingenuity, just as we are astonished at a stage magician or an acrobat who stands on his head

or walks on his hands. Although we are amazed by their abilities, we do not look up to them or value their opinions.

Imagine that someone is researching the workings of the stomach. Many theories have been proposed whose falsehood has already been demonstrated. And many theories that are considered true today will also fall by the wayside. New things will be discovered, and the so-called verities of our day will be laughed at.

Besides, does our stomach know how to work only because of our theoretical understanding? It does its work without fanfare, without all these technical discussions, with surety and knowledge, without theory, with knowledge that is preceded by no doubt about what is right or left, good or evil. This is because, containing the life-force that God placed within it, it does not need to grope and hesitantly consider, like a blind man groping in the dark. Its knowledge is without dispute. It is a perceiving, pure wisdom, a knowledge of simplicity—without confusion, analysis and complexity.

But since human intellect—an empty intellect—lacks this perception and knowledge, it has to create complexity, to create theories, and it grows stymied and trapped within confusion. Sometimes a person stumbles upon a fundamental truth. Other times, however, he falls like a blind person stumbling into a pit. And even when a person knows something, it is only in some partial, superficial manner, and not a true perception and knowledge.

But if all humanity were to be simple, guileless and faithful—which comprises the revelation of spirit, reality and truth—then everyone would know and see things with a complete certainty, not with this fumbling in the darkness that people call “intellect.”

The problem is that there are people who are not actual liars

(claiming that a tree is a stone), yet in whom falsehood exists in a potential state. They lack simplicity, truth, and the reality of the spirit.

And so from this moment on, member of our fellowship, make it your unwavering habit to be totally, completely simple in all that you do. When you are talking to someone or thinking about something, don't mock, and don't try to find something laughable in someone else. Have you ever seen a plant or a simple spirit engaged in mockery?

With the quality of thought that you have already strengthened, imagine yourself standing before God. In all that you do, at home or outside the home, your actions and thoughts are no more than the payment of the debt of your service to God. You are obligated to drive yourself hard so as to pay off that great debt, and hope that at the very least by the end of your life you will have been able to pay off half of your debt to God. With such an attitude, you will not have free time for even an unnecessary breath.

And the more that you imagine this and fix it permanently within your mind and heart, you will grow ever more simple, wise and guileless.

❖ Eighteen: Music–Revelation of the Soul

“Gaze from the peak of Amanah” (*Shir Hashirim*). The word for gaze, “*shuri*,” is cognate to *shir*, “song”; and Amanah is related to *emunah*, “faith.” And so the *Beit Aharon* renders this phrase, “Song is the peak of faith.”

It is not my intent here to explicate the topic of music and the

world of music, for my words here are only directed at how every individual, on whatever level he is, can draw forth living waters from the wellspring of his soul, and manifest the living voice within himself.

Do not be troubled that we see great cantors and musicians whose hearts are far from God, without faith and without a heart (heaven have mercy), and that there are musicians amongst the gentiles as well.

Music is merely a type of revelation of the soul and its feelings. The soul manifests itself in the words with which a person expresses his thoughts and feelings of pain or joy, and, even more than that, in his voice. Our holy texts note that when a person's sufferings overwhelm him (heaven forbid), he can no longer speak, but he only cries out and moans without words. In the same way, a tune, which is comprised of sounds of joy or bitterness, arouses a person's feelings, and within these feelings the lineaments of his soul are revealed. But this does not dictate what an emotion-filled person will do with the portion of his soul that is now manifesting itself.

One person can use his joy to increase his service of God, while another uses his joy to be unruly. Someone might open up his soul so that a part of it emerges—yet not only does he not utilize it, but to the contrary, he damages it, whether by engaging in unrestrained behavior or by indulging a broken heart of depression and despair, until he at last falls from his trust and faith in God, and engages in unbecoming activities (heaven forbid).

Our fellowship is dedicated to God, and we desire to bring our soul to the fore, to rule our bodies. Thus, in order to connect our soul to God's holiness, and to nullify it and our being within the soul of the Almighty, we should accustom ourselves to spiritual singing and

music—not that we need to compose new tunes, just as a person who wants to cheer himself with wine does not have to make wine from the wine press, or just as a person who wants to inspire himself or others does not have to create a new language.

Take some part of a tune, turn your face to the wall or merely close your eyes, and (as suggested in an earlier context) consider that you are standing before God's Throne of Glory, and that with a broken heart you have come to pour forth your soul to God in singing and music that emerges from the depth of your heart. Then you will feel your soul emerging with joyful song. Although at first you are the singer attempting to arouse your soul from its slumber, little by little you will feel that your soul has already begun to sing on its own.

Perhaps you have always been puzzled by music. What are the meaning and effect of the different notes, of the ascents and descents of melody, of the lengths of notes, sometimes very long and sometimes very short?

Now you see everything. Through the sound of music, your soul pierces upward toward the heights. In heaven, it is as if your soul were seized by its sob and drawn out by its tongue. Its heart, guts and all its inner being emerge with its tune, and rise upon the path of notes. Your soul's ascents, falls, and all its peregrinations are engraved upon its melody, the movement of the melody is carved into your soul's voice. The tune comes together, and it lifts up your soul with its guts to pour it forth and bring it close to God.

At times, without even noticing what you are doing, you will speak to God. At first, your words will express the will of your body, but the more you are filled with feeling and the more your soul comes

forth from its sheathe to fly to the heights, the more will you leave this world, and from the depth of your heart your soul will cry out a pure prayer to God. "Heavenly Master, have pity on me and help me in everything. Woe, woe! To what depths I been cast down, Master of the world? Save me!" A person begins by asking for help in all his endeavors, and he ends with an outcry to save him from where he has fallen. Do not disparage such words, for they are quarried from your soul.

At other times, words will not come to you, and you will not feel that you have any request. Nevertheless, you will feel something that you cannot describe: a type of nestling, like a child burrowing into his father. He doesn't want anything from his father, yet he moans, "Father, Father!" His father asks him, "What do you want, my son?" "Nothing," answers the boy, and then again he moans, "Father, Father!"

Be aware that many times we can learn about how the soul manifests itself from a child. None of his actions are premeditated; instead, his soul of its own volition manifests itself in various ways, and the child moves and acts in accordance with those movements of his soul. And when he nestles with his father, this is an outpouring of his soul to the soul of his father. In your melody, you will also at times feel a type of moaning and nestling, without speech, without words, without any request. Only your soul is singing and pouring forth, and exclaiming only "Master of the world, Master of the world!"

This does not necessarily occur only with a brokenhearted tune. It can also take place with a joyful tune. You can use all of these to manifest your soul. That is the way of the Hasid: at times he weeps with a joyful tune, while dancing; at other times he dances with the

tune of Kol Nidrei.

When you are in the company of Hasidim who are singing—whether in prayer, at a meal or in some other manner—sing along with them; not in order to make your voice heard, roaring “as the lioness” (*Yermiahu* 12:8), but only to bring your soul forth and to lift it, as “when the musician played, the spirit of God came upon him” (*Melachim* II 3:15). It is a type of wedding tune uniting the groom and bride (and this will suffice for the knowledgeable).

And you do not have to limit this to occasions when you are with other Hasidim who are singing. At home as well, whenever you feel that the time is right, you can sing; and you do not have to raise your voice, for a person can sing in a hush, and his voice is heard in the heights.

☛ Nineteen: Proper Self-Evaluation

Some people think that only they are men of truth, men who possess a clear consciousness, that only they have succeeded in deluding neither themselves nor others. And so when they feel some sort of inspiration toward holiness, they analyze it to discern whether it is genuine or a mere fantasy, perhaps the result of some physical stimulus, such as a physical worry, happiness, or the like. These people are described in the verse, “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, who view themselves as possessing understanding” (*Yishaya* 5:21).

I have already discussed how any type of inspiration, whatever its cause, opens the doorways of the soul, allowing us to bring our

soul forth and draw it to holiness. Even if a person is deluding himself in regard to his inspiration and emotion, as long as he doesn't purposely intend to deceive himself or others, that inspiration is good, for even if the states of fiery enthusiasm that he experiences are spurious, at least one in ten will be genuine. But those people who are involved in this type of self-analysis, who don't allow their feelings to emerge and blossom because they are so busy examining themselves, will be left with no more than their self-analysis. All their days will be no more than empty and dry, their hearts dulled and their minds darkened (may God protect us from them all). And I understand the writings of our holy rabbis (may their merit protect us) to be saying this as well.

On the other hand, do not imagine that you may pass through life without any self-examination whatsoever, not knowing whether you are in a place of holiness or (heaven forbid) of the Other Side (may the Merciful One protect us, may it not be even mentioned).

There are two types of self-examination.

A Hasid who is serving God may experience a moment of spontaneous inspiration, which has an affect on him. Even if this does not occur spontaneously, he brings himself to an inspired state (using the techniques mentioned here or others). Only afterwards does he examine whether his experience was genuine. He "removes the waste from the fine flour," so that next time his feeling will be even more genuine. All of his self-examination does not lessen his inspiration, nor does it inhibit his fiery enthusiasm. Rather, his self-analysis is another tool that he uses to serve God. First, he experiences fiery enthusiasm, and afterwards he examines himself; his self-examination is not a replacement for the holy service of inspiration.

This is different from the approach of those desiccated self-analysts hunched beneath their evil inclination (may the Merciful One protect us). When their analysis brings them to the slightest self-doubt, they reject their entire positive inspiration. Open your eyes and see that in this case, the evil inclination has gained the upper hand.

A simple type of self-examination is to look at yourself and say, “My first goal in starting to serve God with mindfulness is to take one leap that will lift me beyond my body and senses, so that I will rule over them. Let me see if the service of God that I have just engaged in has affected me that way. If I am really ruling over myself now more than I did before, then my service of God and my fiery enthusiasm were genuine. If not (heaven forbid), then I erred, and I fooled myself.”

Even if the latter is the case, do not let your work and holy service grow feeble. Strengthen yourself yet again, and begin anew—“turn it over and over” (*Pirkei Avot*); do not relent. Does a person stop taking medicine because it did not work the first time? No—he encourages himself and tries it again, and then a third time.

But you must also know the proper strategy for ruling over yourself. You might lack self-control. This does not mean that your service of God following our approach (the approach of the Society for Positive Consciousness) is not good. There may rather be some other failing that is preventing you from ruling over yourself.

Every type of rulership requires a ruling spirit. If an officer or soldier does not have such a spirit of might, he will not be able to stand firm in the midst of the battle, even if he is much stronger than his enemy. The Torah states that in war time, “the fearful man and the man whose heart is soft must return home” (*Devorim* 20:8). Note that

the Torah did not say that a “weak man” must return home. The entire ability of an army to overcome, conquer, and rule over the enemy depends upon a spirit of might.

In the same way, if a person submits to his desires many times (heaven forbid), it may be that his desire is so vast. Rather, he might just have a soft heart. Because neither a spirit of might nor a spirit of self-control has arisen within him, he could not use them to strengthen himself to battle and control even a weak desire.

Our sages explained that the phrase “the fearful man and the man whose heart is soft” refers to a man who fears “the sins in his hand” (*Sotah* 43b). Now we can see how sweet are the words of our sages. This man’s sins are indeed in his hand: under his control. He can direct them however he likes, and can even destroy them. But his failing is that he is fearful and soft-hearted, and has not manifested the spirit of rulership within himself.

How does one do so? If a soldier were to wait until he went to battle his mortal enemies before strengthening himself and manifesting a spirit of might, he would accomplish nothing. The enemy would overwhelm him before he could even lift a finger. How terrible and bitter it would be for him then, no longer an officer or ruler but a slave. Instead, he must learn to arouse and manifest the spirit of might before going out to fight his enemies, while he is still at home, and peace rule within and without.

The same applies to the service of God. Do not wait until you confront a sin (heaven forbid) or even a permissible desire. Instead, apply the words of my holy father (the rabbi and tzaddik), who said that a person must connect his personality traits to his mindfulness in all his affairs, even in nonreligious pursuits.

Then not only will you stop and think before you engage in a particular behavior, but you will arouse yourself to battle against it. Many times, you will refrain from something, even if it is not something forbidden, and even if you do not have a strong desire for it. You will do so in order to animate within yourself a mighty heart and spirit. In this way, you will manifest self-control.

Try this from time to time with trivial matters. For instance, occasionally drink coffee without sugar. Even if something of this nature appears comical to you, it is with such trivial steps that you will bring yourself to stand firm even in the midst of a great battle against forces that oppose your spirit and soul.

Always keep the following principle in mind: eat whatever you need for your health, but be deliberate over every mouthful of food that you eat for its taste. For example, you might have two pieces of meat in front of you, one of which pleases you more than the other. Even if you don't want it that much, even if your preference is only based on the fact that when the plate was brought before you, your glance fell on it first, be aware that a sharp sword is hanging over that piece of meat. Take care and keep away from it.

Similarly, if you love to eat meat, although you do not have to abstain altogether, tell yourself often, "I am in charge of myself, and I have decided that I will not eat meat today." It will not be so terrible if you don't eat meat. You can eat bread instead. You will not die (heaven forbid) if you abstain from meat for a short while.

Understand these words. Treat seriously what I have written here and the implications of these words as well, for you and the entirety of your spiritual life depend on these matters.

☛ **Twenty: A Child of the King**

Our ultimate goal is to transform ourselves so that we are no longer a maidservants' child but the child of the king, so that in our service of God we move closer to Him, from behind the millstone to the King's palace and His Throne of Glory. In other words, not only will we serve God, but we will become servants; not only will we act in a holy manner, but we ourselves will become holy.

Everyone can evaluate himself in the following manner. After any service of God, look within yourself, and say, "I prayed, learned Torah, or whatever. Do I now feel a spirit of purity, even the slightest? After my service of God, are my thoughts, desires and feelings even slightly different from the desires and thoughts I have after my exposure to the world and its impulses? And right now, do I feel any yearning for the state of mind I was in while I was praying and serving God? Do I feel a pain in my heart that I have now drifted so far from the purity and supernal beauty that I had caught a glimpse of in the midst of my prayers?"

If you do see all this and are pained, that is a sign that your divine service was acceptable to God, and that your body has been sanctified by that service. If not, you have erred in your assessment of all your spiritual attainments (heaven forbid). But even if the latter is the case, do not grow discouraged. If the medicine has not worked, gird your loins and grow even stronger in your service of God.

☪ **Guidance and Principles**
(rules, some of which have been discussed earlier)

☪ **One: Read This Book with Feeling**

Now that you have read all of the above, start again and read it through a second time—not like a person reading about someone else’s thoughts, ideas and problems, but as though you are reading about yourself.

Imagine two people who are reciting Psalms. Whereas one of them lacks nothing, the other is immersed in troubles (may the Compassionate One save us). The first one is only reading the words that King David spoke like someone reading a history text. But the suffering person cries out, “I am drowning in a deep swamp” (*Tehillim* 69:3) with his own feelings, as though King David had merely put the words in his mouth so that he could express his heart’s cry. “A prayer for the poor man when he is faint” (*ibid.* 102:1). The word for “faint” can also mean “wrapped.” The poor person is entirely wrapped in his prayer, and his prayer is within him.

Here as well, when you for example read and reread the description of how a person grows upset as his days pass in spiritual poverty and lowliness, it shouldn't be as though you are hearing about someone else's worries; right now you yourself feel upset, with an unsettled feeling that had been previously concealed within you. Or when you read about how a person should remind himself of the imminent day of his death, you are not reading a narrative about some other person for whom you feel sorry; you see this as happening to you.

The same goes for all passages of inspiration that show you how you can fill your thought with enthusiasm and strength.

And so it is not possible to read a great deal of this work at once, because you cannot feel lowly, joyful, brokenhearted and elevated all at one sitting. If you do read this work at one sitting, it will be like a mere narrative. Instead, learn it little by little. Do not just read it silently, but say the words aloud. And go through this book once a month.

❖ Two: Practice the Techniques

Take everything written in this work seriously. Put whatever you read into practice that day, or for two or three days, to anchor it firmly within yourself. Even if you do not succeed the first time, do not grow discouraged, for you are not required to do everything at once.

☪ **Three: Prayer—The Sparks of Your Soul**

When, with the help of God, you experience episodes of holy feeling, fiery passion and an outpouring of your soul so that in your great emotion words pour forth from you (examples of this were given previously), appreciate and value these words. Whenever you want to arouse yourself from your slumber, say these words. Utilize them to petition God, for they are sparks of your soul: they were quarried from your soul and came forth in this form.

☪ **Four: Focus and Passion in Prayer**

When you pray, stand in one place, facing the wall or with your eyes closed. And pray aloud—not merely to raise your voice, but with intent and with the hope that this will rouse your spirit from its sleep, so that it will emerge from its hiding place to greet its King and Maker, Who stands before it.

Be very careful to think of the meaning of the words.

This can be interpreted in various ways. For instance: “Sing to Hashem from the heavens” (*Tehillim* 148:1). A person might just translate the words in his mind: “Sing to” means “praise”; “Hashem” refers to the Holy One, blessed be He; “from the heavens” means the angels in heaven; and so forth. But this kind of understanding will do nothing to inspire him.

The main focus of understanding the words is that when you say “Sing to Hashem,” you see yourself right then speaking to the

entire world and commanding it to sing to God. Although you are merely a being scratched out of physicality, because you are a Jew you are a prince of the world, able to proclaim and to command the entire world, angels as well as this-worldly beings, from the highest spirits to the insects and the grass, “Sing to Hashem from the heavens . . . and sing to Him, all bright stars!”

Have this idea in mind in all your words of prayer. And then you will be inspired to a fiery enthusiasm.

♥ Five: Attaining Good Traits

Whatever good thing you see, whatever spiritual attainment or positive personality trait that you hear about or you read about in some holy volume that some holy person possessed, do not despair and say, “This is beyond my capacity.” To the contrary, desire it and say, “Wasn’t this person just a human being like me? If he had wasted his time the way I do, he also wouldn’t have attained it. So why shouldn’t I myself be able to reach that level?”

Even when you hear some explanation of a verse or of a passage in the Talmud that pleases you, feel a twinge of pain and say, “Why didn’t I come up with that? Isn’t that person a human being like me?”

Whatever will happen, this desire is good. If you do attain what you are yearning for, then your Father in heaven will rejoice and your soul will delight within you. But even if not, this desire was still not wasted. Be aware of this principle: every idea and desire—whether good or bad (heaven forbid)—that a person has does not return empty.

They join together one by one and lodge within his soul one by one, until an entire structure is assembled.

Sometimes a person experiences a bad trait (may the Compassionate One protect us) much worse than he is, and he is astonished at himself: “From where did such a lowly thing ever come to me?” What happened was that even his slightest ideas and desires gathered together inside him. They were so fine that he never even noticed or sensed them. But once inside him, they grew ever thicker, until they appeared and manifested themselves in him in the form of a contemptible trait, an ugly clump (may the Compassionate One protect us).

And the opposite can also occur: every good thought and desire that rises up within you, even if you do not attain it, will thicken and grow, until it appears within you as a holy trait and thought.

❖ **Six: Overcoming Pointless Thoughts**

If you have a bad thought, or even just a pointless thought that is bothering you as you pray or learn Torah, look up to the heavens or close your eyes, and think the words, “Hashem, Hashem, God Who is compassionate and gracious” (*Shemot* 34:6). Only think these words without saying them. With God’s help, it will surely pass on.

❖ **Seven: Yearn to Come Back to God**

Often, whether at home or in the street, with a broken heart bear the following in mind: “The entire world is divinity: every grain of earth beneath my feet, the air I breathe, all of being is divine existence. So why am I so far removed from this, from the camp of God’s Presence? Why am I a separate being with my own desire and consciousness, with a coarse body and spirit (heaven forbid)? Master of the world, bring me close to You in complete goodness, as I turn to You with all my being, bring me close to You in complete goodness.”

❖ **Eight: Improve Your Character**

Work conscientiously to improve your character traits. Work particularly hard to improve any trait that you recognize as especially flawed. Wage war against it. Your strategy should be to seek advice on how to improve it. Learn what is keeping you from improving, and then remove that obstacle. If you do not succeed the first time, try again. If one piece of advice does not work for you, try another approach. If you do not retreat from the field of battle but remain constant, strong and active, God will assist you, and you will be victorious.

In general, making a study of yourself will be very helpful to you. Let us look at how this works. Imagine two people who are easily angered. If they do not examine themselves well, they will find this lowly trait difficult to overcome. But if they look into it deeply and penetratingly so that they come to its root cause, they will be able

to bring healing more quickly than if they had not done so.

The cause of each person's anger may be quite different. One person may simply have be angry by nature. But the other person may not have a problem with anger per se. His problem might be an expanded ego, as a result of which everyone else appears to him to be no more important than an ape. That is why he grows so angry and curses and ridicules others. A man like this could devote his entire life to working on his anger to no avail. After all, he is responding normally to what he perceives to be reality. Even a person who doesn't have an issue with anger could come to yell at—perhaps even strike—a destructive or stubborn animal such as an ape or donkey. Once this person looks at himself deeply so that he comes to understand the core of his anger, and realizes that it is actually an expression of egotism, he will work on his egotism, until it is rehabilitated.

Or let us take an example who presents an egotistical personality. He might simply be an egotist. But it is also possible that he is egotistical because he has never been in the company of people greater than he is. Or, even if he does find himself in their company, he doesn't recognize their greatness. If, for example, he has some skill in learning Torah, he thinks that he is a great scholar, superior to everyone else. The cure for this condition is simple and quite straightforward. He should keep company with people greater than himself and speak with them, and he should study books that discuss treat great and holy character traits and attainments. This will bring him to recognize his insignificance, and he will grow ashamed of his previous egotism.

🕊️ **Nine: Torah Learning**

Do not let a single day pass without learning Torah. It is good to set aside time for learning in the morning, for the Holy One, blessed be He, loves beginnings (as the midrash teaches). If you cannot learn in the morning, do so in the evening.

Set a fixed goal of how much Talmud, Midrash, and so forth you will learn every day and every week, without fail. Grow so accustomed to this schedule and make it such a permanent part of your life that if you do not fulfill it, you will feel it to be as much of a lack as if you had not put on your tefillin (heaven forbid). With this attitude, you will find the time to spend on this. After all, if tefillin and prayer were not absolute obligations, you might imagine that you have no time for them either.

🕊️ **Ten: Personal Commitment**

Heed and listen, remember and guard this well. There are certain practices that you know you should engage in, such as learning Torah, praying, and certain resolutions you make in your everyday life.

You may fail. For instance, although you had to get up early, you failed to do so. Or although you resolved that for a few days you would not eat a food that you find particularly tempting (cf. Seder Hatzot 19), you succumbed and ate it. This failure should seem to you as though you have stumbled and committed a grave sin (heaven forbid). A person who does not view such a failure as a sin over which

to grieve (heaven forbid) is frivolous. And this frivolousness means that he does not take a firm stance but blows in the wind like a hair or a feather. One moment he stands in the east, a moment later a breeze has blown him to the west. Although he resolve to attain all good traits, he cannot be sure that he will actually do so. Worse, his frivolous attitude might even lead him to transgress all the sins in the Torah (heaven forbid).

❖ Eleven: Inspiring Literature

Learn Tanach, Mishnah, Talmud, Zohar and Midrash (particularly the latter two, since their every letter contains a heavenly fire that can destroy the Side of Evil that surrounds you and entices you). If a person is busy and cannot learn all of these topics in one day, he should divide them according to the days of the week: for instance, for four days of the week he will learn Talmud, two days Midrash, and so forth.

Learn works of piety such as the *Sh'lah*, Maharal's writing, the early Hasidim, such as those of the great Maggid, *Noam Elimelech*, the writings of Maggid of Koznitz, *Imrei Elimelech*, *Divrei Elimelech*, *Beit Aharon*, and so forth. Even if you do not understand every passage, do not understand, do not stop learning, since at the very least they are setting forth on the path of holiness, the path of Hasidism. You will understand as much as you can. Beyond that, the words and holy spirit within them will cling to you and will purify you.

Learn some Kabbalah as well, for at the very least you should not be an absolute ignoramus in these matters. *Shefa Tal* is a good

work to begin with.

🕒 **Twelve: Use Your Time Well**

Be extremely careful not to waste even a moment (cf. *Seder Ha'emtzaim* 16). You should view even ten minutes of wasted time as a grave sin (heaven preserve us). You pay for wasted time with your life. The time that you have thrown away, a part of your life, is gone forever; you will never regain it. Remind yourself of your mortality. This day and time are fading away, and you cannot bring them back. If you have wasted time, imagine that you have cut out a strip of your heart and thrown it to the dogs.

If you are in a situation where you cannot learn Torah, then engage in thoughts of Torah. Think about the proper way to live your life and the ways of Hasidism. Think about these things during public prayer when the cantor is repeating the Shmoneh Esrai—unless you are completely immersed in his words, or unless this would so distract you that you would fail to make the communal responses.

Most of all, when you are in the street, immerse your mind and heart in a Torah concept. In this way, not only will you strengthen your heart to grow more holy (which is the main goal of our group), but you will also protect yourself from evil (heaven forbid).

☛ **Thirteen: Plan Your Day**

Set aside a certain amount of time for your every activity. If you are sitting down to eat, set aside a half hour or a quarter hour. If you are unable to learn Torah and decide to visit a friend, set aside a certain amount of time for that, unless you will be discussing Hasidism.

In general, see yourself as a soldier who has tasks to complete, as one hour presses on the next and one action urges on another.

☛ **Fourteen: Utilize the Sabbath Well**

Do not let Friday and Saturday nights in the winter, when the Sabbath begins early, go to waste. Do not go to sleep before eleven o'clock (unless you are planning to rise at dawn). Be aware, on the one hand, of your Maker; and, on the other, of the depths.

☛ **Addendum: The Love and Fear of God**

I have not discussed in any detail the subject of loving and fearing God. This is because in fact every Jewish soul already fears and loves God. The problem is that, since the soul is buried beneath a mat of straw and hidden within the body, its love and fear are also hidden. But when you follow the advice here in order to bring your soul forth, then you will see your love and fear of God appear in their purity. With God's help, they will grow manifest.

❖ Rules of the Group

❖ One: The Statement of Commitment

Make a record book in which members' names and the group's activities are recorded.

Whoever wishes to join the group must sign the statement that appears below. This statement should be written (in Hebrew) in the same script used for Torah scrolls. By signing, a person agrees to all the statements and abide by all the conditions of the group.

❖ Statement of Commitment ❖

With a willing heart and the desire of all my soul, I make a commitment to join the members of this holy society, the "Society for Positive Thought," my intent being that with its help I will wash and purify my body and spirit, sanctify them with the sanctity of the holy God, and connect them to the service of God with willing and

unwavering thought, speech and action.

The Torah gives every Jew the ability to consecrate even an animal to God, and certainly the holiness of his body. And so with this ability, I stand before God and consecrate myself—my body, my spirit and my soul—to Him. May the blessed God, Who does not reject a Jew's dedication, not reject me. May He rest His holiness upon me. Wherever I may be and whatever world I may find myself in, may the holiness of God embrace me and the seven clouds of glory surround me, from now and forever more.

With all my heart and spirit, I plead to God that even if (heaven forbid) my inclination ever overwhelms me and causes me to stumble and fall for even a moment with any desire, thought, word or action that contravenes God's will, may He in His great compassion not reject me. May He not cast me beyond the curtain of the Holy of Holies—just as an animal consecrated to God can no longer return to normal use (even though it is an animal). God's holy and open hand receives those who return to Him. And so may He bring me back to Him with complete repentance, in accordance with my spirit at this moment. From this moment on, with a simple heart and a straight mind, I leave behind the gate of separation and the realm of the Other Side and all its host, which I reject and spurn as the dust of the earth. And I enter with my body and spirit's 248 limbs and 365 sinews the camp of God's Presence.

I resolve that from this moment on, I will be aware of every detail of my actions, thoughts and speech, as is fitting for a person who has been consecrated from on high, so that I shall not (heaven forbid) be unfettered. May the blessed God support me with the right hand of His justice. May He teach me and guide me upon His path, the

path of holiness, in the midst of total spiritual and physical goodness. And may I, my entire family, all my friends and the entire house of Israel attain length of days and years that are good, joyous, satisfied and illumined by the light from above. Amen.

🕯️ Two: You are an Elevated Person

From this moment on, do not regard yourself as a lowly person, an animalistic person for whom any actions and any behaviors, even degraded ones, are appropriate. Instead, as our sages hinted, “a person should always view himself as though holiness rests within his belly” (source). You are elevated, and things that are fit for others are forbidden to you. Regarding your every thought, word and act, do not only look to see whether it is generally acceptable. Such things may be fine for some other person, but not for you. Instead, look to see whether they are right for you at your high level.

This is not to say that you should consider yourself an superior personality and grow proud, heaven forbid. To the contrary, make yourself as nothing before every Jew. Break your heart by telling yourself, “Considering my level and the state of being to which I have dedicated myself, my actions are not correct. Who knows how much damage I am causing with my behavior—my thought, speech and action—since the time that I have consecrated myself to heaven?”

Encourage yourself and strengthen yourself to improve from this moment on.

☛ **Three: How Often to Meet**

The group must meet no less than three times a week. And if it meets more often, that is so much the better.

☛ **Four: Torah Learning**

At your meetings, do not engage in trivial chatter. Everyone present should learn whatever he desires: Talmud, mishnah and so forth. But once a week (or more often, as the majority decides) hold a joint learning session. Choose a text that offers guidance, and learn it together.

☛ **Five: Insights and Inspiration**

When the group learns a such text that offers guidance, do not go through the material as though you are reading some narrative. Instead, learn it calmly and in depth, and apply the words to yourselves: how to implement their guidance and make it a permanent part of yourselves. Then various topics will reveal themselves to you.

In general, if a group member has an insight—whether it occurred to him at a meeting, at home, on the street, or so forth—he should tell it to the others. They in turn should listen attentively. Even if nine times out of ten there is nothing substantial to what he has to say, the tenth time it may be something worthwhile. As the Zohar states, at times one can find a pearl even in a pauper's knapsack.

In general, every good thought about serving God that manifests itself in a Jew's mind and heart is a species of an echo of the voice of his spirit: the echo of an outcry lamenting its downfall, or a sound of joy when it is ascending.

And the group member who is expressing his ideas should not merely wish be interested in speaking at length and displaying his wisdom.

☛ **Six: Drinking *L'chaim!***

From time to time, it is good to have a drink together—not to grow drunk and rowdy, heaven forbid, but in the Hasidic manner: in order to bond more closely and also to awaken your spirit—even your animal spirit—from its sloth. Even if a group member does not usually drink alcohol because of poor health (heaven forbid), he should dilute some alcohol with water and drink along with everyone else.

☛ **Seven: Song and Dance**

After having a drink, sing an inspiring tune such as *Yedid Nefesh*, *Adon Olam*, *Mizmor L'Dovid* (“Hashem is my Shepherd, I will not lack”), and so forth. If your spirits are aflame and you want to dance together, then do so—as long as you do not spend the entire time drinking, singing and dancing.

☪ **Eight: The Camp of God's Presence**

View your meeting place as a sanctified space, the center of the world. It is a bath house where souls are washed and purified. You are entering the camp of God's Presence, here in this space. On your way, imagine that you are leaving the realm of this world and going to a branch of the lower Garden of Eden, which God has brought down to your meeting place. Your heart should be glad and you should rejoice with a holy trembling in your great happiness that even in this world you can take refuge under the wings of God's Presence.

When you arrive at your meeting place, you should certainly rejoice and bear in mind that God's Holy Presence is in your midst. "My spirit is sick with love for You; please, God, heal it by showing it the delight of Your radiance" (*Yedid Nefesh*). Awaken a yearning that God reveal in your heart a spark of the delight of His radiance and the beauty of His might that is found here.

☪ **Nine: One-on-One Camaraderie**

This holy society stands upon three principles: (a) the bonding of its members, (b) their love for each other and (c) their closeness to each other.

You have all joined together in loving camaraderie, and you all love each other a great deal.

In addition, every member should choose one other person to whom he will reveal all the secrets of his heart, in both spiritual and physical matters: his worries and joys, his failures and successes. The

person who is listening should console him, advise him and cheer him as much as he can. And he should advise and guide him in all matters, including the spiritual, in accordance with that person's state of mind and situation.

Then they should switch roles.

If there is any person whom no one has chosen as a partner, the group must assign him a partner.

♥ Ten: Keep a Low Profile

Group members should neither speak about nor publicize this holy group, its ways and activities. They should not boast about it before others. God said of the second set of the Ten Commandments—the set which lasted—that “there is nothing finer than concealment” (source). The holy Zohar was revealed in the cave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and in the wilderness, secretively. The entire Kabbalah is called a “secret.” So also, any service of God that involves a revelation of your spirit stands in opposition to tumult and publicity, and finds concealment congenial. “Hashem is not in the uproar” (*Melachim I 19:11*).

But if someone wants to join, accept him warmly, and tell him about the group—as long as it is clear to you that his intent is for the sake of heaven. Also, you may propose to someone that he join the group if you see that his inclusion would benefit both him and the group. (Just be sure that you yourself have no ulterior motive.)

♥ Eleven: On the Job

If a group member works throughout the day to earn a living, he must say during his labors, several times a day, “Master of the world, at the moment I find myself in places that are dangerous to my spirit and holiness. Do not abandon me; support and guard me, Guardian of Israel.” You do not have to use these exact words, but something to this effect, in whatever words work for you.

❖ **Twelve: Respect Group Members**

View every member of the group as an elevated person. Respect and honor him, for he is one of the sons of the prophets. In addition, he has dedicated himself to holiness, so that the Presence of God might rest upon him.

❖ **Thirteen: Group Members from Out of Town**

Someone from out of town may also join the group.

If you find members in your own area, act in the manner described above.

But even if not, you can still form a group. Do as much as you can on your own. And all the members of the group must meet no less than once a year for a few days—not in order to hold a convention with hoopla and commotion, but in order to spend those days in service and separation from this world. Discuss your practices in serving God throughout the year, how you sanctify all your actions for the sake of

God's glory, and how you resolve to increase your self-encouragement and immerse yourself in the holiness of God from this day forth.

☛ **Conclusion: You Will Succeed**

If you have read this far and you see that you have erred, that you have come to an area in which you have no interest—because you think us deluded or non-productive—then for your own sake and our sake, leave our group at once, go back to your miasma, and we will go forward for the sake of Hashem our God.

However, if you see that our path is your path, and that which we seek you also seek, then join us.

Perhaps your heart is heavy within you because, after having read through this work once, twice or three times, you still do not have the sense of having come to where God's Presence rests, you still do not see anything or feel anything, you still have no elevated thought or inspiration—you have in fact experienced nothing that we have discussed. Do not let your spirit fall. Realize that the distance from the earth to the heavens is a journey of five hundred years. And so, not having reached the heavens in a single leap, why should you be discouraged?

I am certain that after you spend a period of time engaged in constant work of this type, God will help you sense the rays of supernal light and divine holiness that have entered your soul, body and essence. At the very least, you will begin to act in a more refined and improved manner in all areas affecting your body and soul. Your

thoughts will start becoming qualitatively different.

Then you will be inspired and experience greater feeling in your prayers. You will know how to make use of all the experiences of your soul—its joy and broken-heartedness—to bring it forth to meet its Beloved, and to purify it on the highest plane. You will learn how to look at every commandment from the viewpoint of the soul. You will merit at least some measure of preparation for self-sacrifice with your entire body and soul when reciting the *Sh'ma*.

In this alone, you will have risen somewhat to be a spiritual person. And then a supernal sight will begin to spark within you, so that you will see in everything the holiness of the “fine, beautiful One, the radiance of the world” (*Yedid Nefesh*). At first these sights will be minor. But with every experience, they will grow to become more clear and frequent. Ultimately, you will not remain a spiritually uncultivated person. You will be someone centered in the world-to-come even as you still live in this world.

Let us be strong, let us strengthen ourselves, for God is with us!