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Spiritual Path

Our need to perceive the Divine makes us spare no effort in attempting to solve all of nature's mysteries, leaving no stone unturned either in ourselves or in our environment. But only the yearning to perceive the Creator is a true yearning, since He is the Source of everything and, above all, He is our Creator. Therefore, even if a human being existed alone in this world, or in other worlds, one's search for the self would inevitably lead to a search for the Creator.

There are two lines that reveal the Creator's influence on His creations. The right line represents His personal Providence over each of us, regardless of our actions. The left line represents the Providence over each of us, depending on our actions. It stands for punishment for evil deeds and reward for good ones.

When we choose a certain time to proceed along the right line, we must tell ourselves that everything in the world happens only because the Creator wants it to happen. Everything proceeds according to His Plan, and nothing depends on us.

From this point of view, we have neither faults nor merits. Our actions are determined by the aspirations that we receive from the outside.

We must therefore thank the Creator for all that we receive from Him. Moreover, realizing that the Creator leads us to eternity, we can develop feelings of love for Him. We can move forward with a proper combination of the right and left

lines, aiming exactly at the middle. That is, we can advance only along the line that is exactly halfway between them.

Yet, even if we begin to advance from a correct starting point, if we don't know exactly how to continually check and correct our course, we are sure to deviate from the correct path. Furthermore, if we make even the slightest deviation at any point along the journey, then our error will increase with every step as we continue moving forward. Consequently, we will get farther and farther from our set goal.

Before our souls descend into this world, they are a part of the Creator, a tiny element of Him. This element is known as "the root of the soul." The Creator places the soul into the body so it can elevate the body's desires when the soul rises and merges with the Creator again.

In other words, the soul is placed into the body when a person is born into this world to overcome the desires of the body. By overcoming the desires of the body, the soul ascends to the same spiritual level it descended from, experiencing far greater pleasures than it had in its initial state when it was part of the Creator. At this point, a tiny element is transformed into a whole spiritual body, and is 620 times greater than was the original element before it descended into this world.

Thus, in its complete state, the spiritual body of the soul consists of 620 parts, or organs. Each part is considered to be a spiritual law or spiritual act (*mitzvah*). The Light of the Creator or the Creator Himself (which are the same) that fills every part of the soul is called "Torah."

When we ascend to a new spiritual level, it is called "fulfilling a spiritual law."

As a result of this elevation, new altruistic aspirations are created and the soul receives the *Torah*, the Light of the Creator.

The true path to this goal proceeds along the middle line. This implies combining three concepts into one: the human being, the path to follow, and the Creator. Indeed, three objects exist in the world : the human being, who is striving to return to the Creator, the path one needs to follow in order to reach the Creator, and the Creator, the goal toward which the human being is striving.

As has been said many times, there is nothing that truly exists except the Creator, and we are but His creations, endowed with a sense of our own existence. We come to recognize this clearly in the course of our spiritual ascent.

All of our perceptions, or rather, the perceptions we see as our own, are but responses to the Divine Acts He has produced in us. In the end, our feelings are only what He wants us to feel.

As long as we have not yet fully comprehended this truth, we will see not one, but three separate concepts: the self, the path to the Creator, and the Creator Himself. However, once we have reached the final stage of spiritual development, once we have ascended to the same level from which our souls descended—only this time with all our desires corrected—we can receive the Creator completely into our spiritual body.

Then, we will receive all the Light of the Creator and the Creator Himself. In this manner, the three objects that once existed separately in our perception: ourselves, our spiritual path, and the Creator merge to become a single entity—the spiritual body filled with Light.

Therefore, to ensure that we proceed correctly, we must conduct regular checks while advancing on the spiritual path. This will ensure that we strive for all three objects with an equally powerful desire from the very outset, regardless of the fact that we perceive the three objects to be separate.

From the outset, we must work to blend them into one; at the end of the path, this will be apparent. They are, in fact, apparent now, even though we are unable to see them as such, due to our own imperfections.

If we strive for one of the three objects more than for the others, we will immediately deviate from the true path. The simplest way to check whether we are still on the true path is to determine whether we are striving to comprehend the characteristics of the Creator in order to become one with Him.

"If I am not for me, then who is for me? And if I am only concerned with myself, then what am I?" These contradictory statements reflect the conflicting attitudes we face when considering our efforts to attain a set personal goal. On the one hand, we must believe that there is no one to turn to for help but ourselves, and act with the certainty that our good deeds will be rewarded and our evil deeds will be punished.

We, as individuals, must believe that our own actions have direct consequences, and that we build our own futures. On the other hand, we must say to ourselves, "Who am I, to be able to defeat my own nature by myself? Yet, no one else can help me, either."

Providence of the Creator

If everything happens according to the Creator's Plan, then what good are our efforts? As a result of our own work, based on the principle of reward and punishment, we acquire from Above an understanding of the Creator's Rule. We then rise to a level of consciousness where we clearly see that it is the Creator who rules everything and that everything is predetermined.

First, however, we must reach this stage, and until we do, we cannot determine that everything is in the hands of the Creator. Also, until we reach that stage, we cannot live or act according to its laws, for this is not how we understand the world to operate. Therefore, we can act only according to the laws of which we are aware.

Only when we have put forth efforts based on the principle of "reward and punishment" do we become worthy of the Creator's complete trust. Only then do we have the right to see the true picture of the world, as well as the way it operates. And when we arrive at this stage, and realize that everything depends on the Creator, we long for Him.

One cannot oust selfish thoughts and desires from one's heart and leave it empty. Only by filling the heart with spiritual, altruistic desires instead of selfish ones can we replace the old aspirations with opposite ones, and in this way obliterate egoism.

Those of us who love the Creator are sure to feel revulsion toward egoism, since we know from personal experience how much harm the ego can cause.

However, we may not have the means to rid ourselves of the ego, and will eventually realize that it is beyond our power to oust egoism, since it was the Creator who had endowed us, His creations, with this quality.

Although we cannot rid ourselves of egoism by our own efforts, the sooner we realize that egoism is our enemy and our spiritual exterminator, the stronger will be our hatred of it. Eventually, this hatred will bring the Creator to help us overcome the enemy; in this way, even our egoism will serve the purpose of spiritual elevation.

The Talmud says, "I created the world only for the completely righteous and for the complete sinners." It is understandable why the world would be created for the

absolutely righteous, but why wasn't the world also created for those who are neither absolutely righteous nor absolute sinners?

We inadvertently perceive Providence according to the way it affects us. It is "good" and "kind" if it is agreeable to us, and "harsh" if it causes us suffering. That is, we consider the Creator either good or bad, depending on how we perceive our world.

Thus, there are only two ways for human beings to perceive the Providence of the Creator over the world. Either we perceive the Creator and see life as wonderful, or we deny the Creator's Providence over the world, and assume the world is ruled by "forces of nature."

Though we may realize that the latter scenario is unlikely, our emotions, rather than our reason, determine our attitude toward the world. Hence, when we observe the disparity between our emotions and our reason, we begin to consider ourselves as sinners.

When we understand that the Creator wants to bestow only benefit and good, we realize this is possible only by drawing closer to Him. Thus, if we feel distanced from the Creator, we perceive this as "bad," and then we consider ourselves to be sinners.

But if we feel ourselves to be so evil that we cry out to the Creator to save us, asking the Creator to reveal Himself to give us the power to break out from the prison of our egoism into the spiritual world, then the Creator will help us instantly.

It is for this form of human condition that this world and the Higher Worlds were created.

When we reach the level of absolute sinner, we can cry out to the Creator and eventually rise to the level of the absolutely righteous.

Thus, we can only become worthy of perceiving the Creator's greatness after we have rid ourselves of all conceit and realized the impotence and the baseness of our personal desires.

The more importance we ascribe to becoming close to the Creator, the more we perceive Him and the better we can discern the Creator's various nuances and manifestations in our daily lives. This deep, impressive awe of Him will give rise to feelings in our hearts, and as a result joy will flow in.

We can see that we are no better than those around us, and yet we can also see that, unlike us, others have not earned the Creator's special attention. Moreover, others are not even aware that the possibility of communicating with the Creator exists. Nor do they really care to perceive the Creator and understand the meaning of life and spiritual progress.

On the other hand, we are not clear how we merited such a special relationship with the Creator, in that we are granted, if only just occasionally, the opportunity to concern ourselves with the purpose of life and our bond with the Creator.

If, at that point, we can appreciate the uniqueness of the Creator's attitude toward us, then we can experience boundless gratitude and joy. The more we can appreciate individual success, the more deeply we can thank the Creator.

The more nuance of feeling we can experience at each particular point and instant of contact with the Creator, the better we can appreciate the greatness of the spiritual world that is revealed to us, as well as the greatness and might of the omnipotent Creator. This results in stronger confidence with which we can anticipate our future unification with Him.

When contemplating the vast difference between the characteristics of the Creator and those of His created beings, it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that the Creator and

created can only become compatible if the created beings alter their absolutely egoistic nature. This is only possible if the created nullify themselves as if they do not exist; thus, there is nothing to separate them from their Creator.

Only if we feel that, without receiving a spiritual life, we are dead (as when life has left the body), and only if we feel a compelling desire for a spiritual life, can we receive the possibility of entering this spiritual life, to breathe spiritual air.

Realizing the Creator's Rule

How can we rise to a spiritual level where we have completely eradicated self-interest and self-concern? How can our desire to devote ourselves to the Creator become our only goal, so much so that without attaining this goal, we feel as if we were dead?

Rising to this level takes place gradually and is processed in the form of feedback. The more effort we make in our quest for a spiritual path, both in studying and in emulating spiritual objects, the more convinced we will become of our utter inability to achieve this goal by ourselves. The more we study texts that are important for our spiritual development, the more confusing and disorganized the material will appear. The better we try to treat our instructors and peers, if we are indeed advancing spiritually, the clearer it will become that all our actions are dictated by egoism.

Such results follow the principle: *Force him until he says, "I do."* We can rid ourselves of egoism only if we grasp that egoism causes death by holding us back from realizing true, eternal life, filled with delight.

Developing a hatred toward egoism will eventually lead to our liberation from it.

Most important is our desire to give ourselves fully to the Creator by realizing His greatness. (Giving oneself to the Creator means to separate from the "I").

At this point, we must decide which is a more worthy goal: to attain transient values or eternal ones. Nothing that we have created remains forever; all is transient. Only spiritual structures such as altruistic thoughts, acts, and feelings are eternal.

Therefore, by striving to emulate the Creator in our thoughts, desires and efforts, we are, in fact, building the structure of our own eternity. However, dedicating ourselves to the Creator is only possible when we realize the Creator's greatness.

It is the same in our world: If we consider someone great, we are happy to be of service to that person. We may even feel that the recipient of our gift has done us a favor by accepting it, rather than the other way around.

This example shows that the *intention* of an action can change the external form of a mechanical act—giving or taking—to its opposite. Therefore, the more praiseworthy we regard the Creator, the more readily will we give Him all of our thoughts, desires and efforts.

But in doing so, we actually feel that we are receiving from, rather than giving to, Him. We feel that we are being given an opportunity to render a service, an opportunity that is only bestowed upon a few worthy ones in each generation. This can further be clarified by the example provided in the following short play.