

# **From the Depths**

*The Torah's Ancient Blueprint for  
Transmuting Suffering into Light*

Yaakov



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# Introduction

*Mima'amakim* — from the depths.

These are the words of King David, crying out to the Creator from the deepest pit of darkness. As it is written in Psalms 130: "*Mima'amakim kratica*" — out of the depths I have called to You, God.

That is where this book begins. Not with answers. With a cry.

Because that is where my story began. And if I am honest — it began early. Very early.

As far back as I can remember, pain has been the backdrop of my life.

Specifically, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and celiac disease — undiagnosed for many years — that manifested as brain fog, confusion, an inability to focus or think clearly, poor memory, an exhaustion that no amount of sleep could touch, a debilitating heaviness, and a general sense of unwell being that reverberated through my nervous system like an unpleasant low hum that never quite went away. And the celiac caused recurring stomach pains that I could not explain because no one had named what was wrong yet. This was the backdrop of my life for as far back as I can remember.

Needless to say, it made school intolerable. Torture. Home life was no picnic either. I felt extremely unsupported, misunderstood, and like a general burden on the people around me. There was a strong sense of rejection and loneliness that followed me everywhere.

This is what turned me into a seeker. As a teenager, while my friends were reading novels and watching television, I was reading books — self-help books, whatever I could get my hands on — hoping that something would come along that would make sense out of the madness.

At seventeen, I left home and traveled to Israel, hoping to find somewhere I might have a little peace. Somewhere I could feel like I belonged.

I went to study there, though it was not easy — the brain fog and exhaustion I carried made sure of that. But I look back on that period positively. It set me on a path that brought me to where I am today.

At twenty, I met my ex-wife. I thought: here is a chance to start over. To build a quiet little place in the world where perhaps I would find some peace and happiness.

But of course all the baggage and the pain accompanied me into that stage of my life too, making marriage very difficult. And if those things alone were not difficult enough, I realized quickly that I was not living with the easiest person. That added greatly to an already strained sense of self and rising stress.

What kept me going was my faith in God. He had always been my refuge and my strength. But as the years dragged on, the little strength I had was dwindling. Life was getting heavier and heavier.

The kids came along. The financial responsibilities grew. Every day felt like a battle — a struggle just to keep going. Many times I reached the point where I cried out to God and pleaded my case, told Him how impossible it felt to continue, and asked that if He was not going to save me, could He please at least end me.

Neither happened. And every time I thought it could not get harder, it did.

I remember sitting in my car once, after losing my job, the wife and kids at home. My body felt so heavy that if bombs had been falling, I would have made no attempt to get up and run. I just sat there. Not wanting to go home. Dreading going home. Not wanting to face my wife and kids. Thinking: can it get any darker than this?

It did.

My ability to function at work was deteriorating. My marriage was in tatters. My kids were young and had many needs and struggles of their own. I wanted to be there for them. I did not know how.

And then came the worst experience of my life — worse than anything I had endured across all the long, miserable years that preceded it. I was very deeply betrayed by someone very close to me. And it felt like the world was crumbling in around me.

The exhaustion had caught up with me. The financial pressure. The weight of home. The physical pain. I could not take it anymore.

From that deepest pit of hell, I cried out to God and begged Him: please, just end me. I did not even want life to be fixed anymore. I just wanted it to end.

I found myself wondering whether there had ever been a human being placed in a deeper pit. I do not deny the possibility. It simply seemed hard to imagine.

And that is when I flew from Phoenix to New York.

I had to get away. I could not take it anymore. I needed time to think, to process. I did not know how I would ever be able to go back to Arizona and face my children. I felt broken. Shattered into a million pieces. Nothing left to give.

While in New York, I spent my time reflecting on my life, trying to make some sense out of the chaos and maybe put some of the pieces, the shattered shards, back together. I received a phone call from my ex-wife telling me that she had lost her job and that they were needing money, so I went to see what I could do to help the situation.

I found myself in a car with four strangers one evening. I sat in the back, pressed against the window, watching the city go by — when suddenly the floor dropped out beneath me. The weight and horror of all the pain and suffering over the long years of my life, in one moment, just began to crash down on me. I felt the weight of the whole world crumbling on top of me. A deer in the car with four people I did not know at all, complete strangers. Everything crashing around me. The weight of all the bitterness and the misery and the pain and the suffering began to inundate me and drown me like waves overtaking me — and then, in the midst of that complete chaos, a thought, a spark, appeared.

In the times of the temple, when the Creator lived amongst us, people had the opportunity to bring a sacrifice, a gift to God. Not because it did not hurt to give it up. Precisely because it did. We don't have that anymore.

So I had this thought. What if I could take this moment, this darkness that was so dark that I may never again — or at least hopefully never again — be in such a situation like this? What if I could give this moment to the Creator? To place it down and say: this is Yours. I am not keeping this for myself.

So I started to think about what He had given me.

Not in a forced way. Not as a technique I had learned somewhere. I just started, quietly, to list all the blessings He has given me over the years. My children. The mind I had been given — this particular mind that had always seen patterns, connected dots, held two contradictory things at once until they resolved into something new. The relationship with God that I had carried since I was a child, the conversations I had with Him walking through my day, the sense that He was genuinely there and genuinely listening. The Torah I had learned. The fact that I was alive and breathing and in a car on my way somewhere, which is more than nothing.

One thing at a time. Each one held for a moment. Each one real.

And something happened.

It lasted maybe a few minutes. But for those few minutes, I felt something I can only describe as joy. A genuine, unforced, unexplained joy. A crack of light in a place that had been sealed shut for as long as I could remember. The pain came back — of course it did, nothing had changed, my life was still in pieces — but that was later. In those minutes, something had shifted. And I thought: if I can feel that here — in this car, in this darkness, with everything I have lost — then the door exists. I just need to find the rest of the path.

That moment was the beginning of this book.

I flew back to Phoenix. I did not go home — that chapter was over. I stayed with a friend. And then one day I went and picked up my children and took them to the park.

I was broken inside. Completely tattered. There is no other word for it. But I looked at my children — the youngest barely a year old — and I made a decision. I put on the best face I had, which was not a very good face, but it was what I had. And I told them: we are going to rebuild.

I found a house. I rented it. I moved my children in. And we started again.

Everything that follows is the map I found.

It is a map drawn from Torah — from the ancient Jewish wisdom tradition, its mystical and legal dimensions both — from the hidden architecture of the Tabernacle

that the Jewish people built in the desert, and from the teachers whose words carried me through the years that followed. It is also drawn from my own life — from the journey from that car in the dark to where I stand now.

I want to be clear about something: I am not writing from the other side of complete salvation. I am writing from inside the journey — further along than I was, transformed in ways I could not have imagined from that car — but still on the road. Still walking. Still trusting the map.

I am not writing as an authority. I have no credentials to offer you. What I have is a system — an ancient blueprint, hidden inside the Torah and the Kabbalistic tradition that grew from it, for transmuting suffering into light. A system that was lost through the long pages of history, and then pieced together painstakingly, bit by bit, forged in the fires of the deepest pits of hell. A system that pulled me out of that pit. That gave me a way to make sense of what had seemed like madness. That showed me how to find meaning in the darkness rather than just surviving it. And that opened, for me, the possibility of genuine healing — not just management, not just coping, but actual transmutation of the darkness into something else entirely.

I did not write this book because I found a few interesting ideas about suffering and light. I wrote it because the ideas in this book saved my life. They pulled me out of the darkest pits of hell and carried me through its fires, to a place of joy, gratitude and restoration. In other words — it works. And my entire hope for this book is to find people who are going through exactly what I went through — who find themselves in the deep abyss — and share with them what I found, in the hope that they too may enjoy the benefits and relief that I now enjoy from this lost knowledge.

Of course, everyone is welcome to read it. But I wrote it for those who are suffering. I am giving it away to the world without charge precisely to make sure it gets to the ones who need it most. The only thing I ask: if you benefited from it, if you find light in these words, please pass it along whenever you see someone in pain.

I know what it feels like to be hanging on by a thread. To wake up in the morning and have to talk yourself into continuing. To feel the particular kind of hopelessness that comes not from one bad event but from a tiredness and exhaustion that reaches into the bones, to the very essence of your being. The despair that is not dramatic. It is just quiet,

and heavy, and always there. And the particular loneliness of suffering that no one around you seems able to reach or understand or fix.

You do not need to be all the way out. You do not need to know how the story ends. You need to know that the door exists, that others have found it, and that there is a path with your name on it.

This book is for anyone who is suffering. Physical suffering. Emotional suffering. The wreckage of a betrayal or a loss. The exhaustion that no one around you seems able to see or reach. Whatever the shape of your darkness — the map is the same. The path leads to the same place.

You found this book somehow. That is not an accident.

One more thing, and I say it from the heart.

The journey in these pages is rooted in the Torah — in Jewish text, Jewish teaching, and the Kabbalistic tradition that grew from it. That is my language, my home, my source. But the suffering this book addresses does not belong to any one people.

God's truth is God's truth. It does not require a membership card. The ancient blueprint hidden inside these texts was placed there for every human soul that has ever cried out from the depths — regardless of where they came from or what name they call the Creator.

So to all my non-Jewish brothers and sisters — you are not guests here. I wrote it for everyone who is searching for what I was searching for. And I am honored that you are here. You are most welcome.

And for our elderly — my message to you is this: do not say to yourself, "What is the point of walking this path? It is too late for me." This path carries a light and a power that can extend the years of your life. Even if it does not, at the very least it could make the time you have remaining more joyful, more purposeful, more meaningful — and perhaps even help correct some of the mistakes that we have all made over the years of our lives, so that when we face our Creator, we can stand with our head held a little bit higher. It is never too late, as long as there is still life and breath left in you.

Yaakov is my first name. But it is also the name of the Jewish people — as we find throughout the Jewish scriptures: the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), and the blessings of Bilaam in Numbers 23 and 24, where he uses the names Jacob and Israel interchangeably to describe the nation camped before him.

This book does not belong to me alone.

I may have been the one to put the puzzle pieces together, with God’s help. But the pieces themselves were built by others — by the Prophets of old, the Sages, the rabbis and teachers and ancient ones who walked through centuries of exile, through the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Cossacks, the pogroms, the expulsions, the Holocausts. The lies, the malice, and the torture. Surrounded by the pain and suffering that was imposed upon them and their communities, seeing the sheer pain of the people around them holding on by their fingernails, they worked diligently to unravel the mystery of *Geulah* — of redemption — in order to help their people out of their suffering. They built this book. They built this picture, each piece of the puzzle painstakingly, through the fires of their own lives. That is who they were. And that is who this book belongs to — not to one man alone but to my people who have given their blood for this knowledge. I am only the one who found it and is now passing it along.

We were called to be a light unto the nations. This is that light. We share this work with anyone who desires to come under the wings of the Almighty. You are welcome here. He loves you and He desires your closeness. The Jewish people were given the mandate to carry this light unto the world — and what we now share is three thousand years of seeking and searching, and the answer we found: how to get out of exile and connect ourselves to the Almighty.

One practical note: Hebrew and Aramaic terms appear throughout this book. Each is explained when first introduced, but if you ever need a quick reminder along the way, there is a glossary — A Note on Hebrew Terms — at the back of the book. It is there for you whenever you need it.

*Mima’amakim kraticha* — from the depths, I called.

And something answered.

That answer is this book.

*With gratitude.*

To the Creator — for taking me on this most wonderful journey, for teaching me these wisdoms, and for allowing me to be the conduit for such important knowledge. I am truly humbled by it. Thank You. I love you.

And to my brother Yehuda — who has helped me over the years in putting together the pieces of this puzzle, who has been indispensable in me getting to where I am today, and whose insights are sprinkled throughout this book. Thank you, brother. I love you.

And to my amazing parents — for the gift of life, and for everything you have given me and done for me over the years. Thank you. I love you.

# Chapter One — The World Is Not What It Appears

Let's start at the very beginning.

Before we can understand why we suffer — before we can understand what healing actually is or how it works — we need to understand something fundamental about the world we are living in. Not its geography. Not its history. Its nature. What kind of place is this, and what is it designed to do?

Healing — real healing, the kind that reaches the root rather than managing the surface — requires addressing three interconnected layers simultaneously.

The first is physical: diet, nutrition, sleep, the restoration of the body's natural systems.

The second is psychological: the accumulated weight of trauma, chronic stress, shame, guilt, and unprocessed emotion. Without addressing these, physical interventions remain incomplete. The body cannot rebuild while the inner world is in a state of constant siege.

The third is spiritual and cognitive: the belief structures that govern everything. How we interpret reality shapes our neurological and physiological responses at the most fundamental level. Rewiring the inner world — the operating system of beliefs through which we experience everything — is not optional. It is the foundation.

All three layers are real. All three matter. But they are not equal in depth. The physical expresses what the psychological drives, and the psychological expresses what the spiritual and cognitive generate. Which is why this book begins where it does — not with the body, but with the world the body is living in, and what that world is actually designed to do.

The ancient Jewish sages made a choice in how they named this world that I think is one of the most revealing things ever said about human existence.

In Hebrew, the word for world is *olam*. That same root word — *he'elem* — means concealment. Hidden-ness. The world is, by its very name, a place of concealment. But

the sages went further than that. They did not simply call it *olam* — they called it *Olam HaSheker*. The World of Falsehood.

Think about that choice for a moment. They could have named it a little less negative sounding. They could have called it *Olam HaZman VeHaMakom* — the world of time and space. That would have been accurate and descriptive. Instead they chose to define it by what they saw as its most defining characteristic: falsehood. Why?

Not because the world is evil. Not because physical reality is an illusion to be escaped. But because this world is structurally designed to present a surface that obscures the deeper reality beneath it. Things appear to be one way. They are actually another. The surface conceals the truth. And therefore our entire task becomes — as human beings, as souls navigating this world — to see through the concealment and find what is actually real — Truth.

This is not a flaw in the design. It is the design. And understanding it changes everything about how we experience suffering — and how we find our way out of it.

Now, if the world is built on falsehood and concealment, where did that begin? How did we get here?

The answer takes us back to the Garden of Eden — and to something that is almost universally misunderstood about what happened there.

Everyone knows the story: Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. That is presented as the sin. But look more carefully at the text and you will see something remarkable. The eating was not where it began. The eating was the consequence. The sin began earlier — at the moment when Eve believed the serpent.

The serpent told her a series of lies. And she swallowed them. And once she had swallowed the lies — once those false beliefs had taken root in her inner world — the fruit began to look different to her. The Torah says: "And she saw that the tree was good for eating." But God had told them clearly: "On the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die." (*Genesis 2:17*) How could she now see it as good for eating?

Because her perception had already been hijacked by the false beliefs she had accepted. The seeing came from the believing. And once you see something through the lens of a false belief, the false belief feels like reality — and you act accordingly.

This is the beginning of *Olam HaSheker*. Not a world that is physically false, but a world that allows and leaves room for misperception, which then gives rise to false

beliefs, and in which false beliefs shape our perceptions, and our distorted perception generates the experience of our lives. The serpent's poison — what the Kabbalistic tradition calls the *zuhamah shel nachash*, the toxin of the serpent — is not venom in the biological sense. It is a set of foundational false beliefs planted into the deepest layer of human consciousness. Beliefs that are still running in us today. Beliefs that are at the root of our suffering.

Now we come to the faculty that is the antidote to all of this. In Hebrew it is called *Emunah* — often translated as faith, but that translation does not fully capture what it is.

*Emunah* is not simply the acceptance of something true. It is the soul's power of acceptance itself — the faculty by which a human being holds something as real. And this is crucial to understand: *Emunah* is neutral in itself. It can be directed toward truth, or it can be directed toward falsehood. In fact, the entire problem we are describing — the suffering that comes from living in *Olam HaSheker* — is precisely the result of *Emunah* invested in false beliefs. The soul's power of acceptance has been pointed at things that are not actually true. And because the soul is powerful, whatever it accepts as true becomes, experientially, the reality it lives in.

This is why the work of healing is not about generating more faith. You already have *Emunah* — the power of acceptance is already fully operational in you. The work is about redirecting it. Pointing it away from the false beliefs that are generating suffering and toward what is actually true.

*Emet* — truth — is what is actually real. And Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the great eighteenth-century mystic whose teachings run throughout this book, devoted an entire section of his work — compiled by his devoted student Rabbi Natan of Breslov, who gathered and organized Rabbi Nachman's teachings into written form — *Likutey Etzot* — a compendium of his practical teachings — to *Emet v'Emunah*, Truth and Faith, as a combined topic. This is notable: most subjects in *Likutey Etzot* are treated independently, each in its own chapter. But Truth and Faith are merged into one — since the two are inseparable, two sides of the same coin. Not because you cannot have *Emunah* in something false — you clearly can, and this is the problem — but because the destination is their unity: a soul whose power of acceptance is fully aligned with what is actually real — Truth. That alignment is the goal. That is healing.

Truth is the map. *Emunah* is the acceptance, the belief, that the map is correct. And *Bitachon* — trust — is walking the path.

*Bitachon* is *Eemunah* in action. If *Eemunah* is the soul's acceptance of what is true — the inner knowing that God is running the world, that everything is in His hands, that the concealing surface of this world is not the whole story — then *Bitachon* is what that knowing looks like in practice. It is the trust that expresses itself in how you respond to circumstances. In whether you panic or stay grounded. In whether you try to control everything or release what is not in your hands. In whether you read the surface of the world as the final word or keep looking for what is underneath it.

*Eemunah* holds the truth. *Bitachon* lives it.

Now we come to perhaps the most practically important idea in this chapter — one that will change the way you understand your own emotional life.

Your emotions are not random. They are not simply reactions to what happens to you. They are a feedback mechanism — a built-in signal system — a compass — telling you something about your alignment with truth.

Think of it this way. When a compass needle swings away from north, it is not malfunctioning. It is doing exactly what it was designed to do — showing you that something has pulled you off course. The swing of the needle is information.

Your emotional state works the same way. When you are in a state of chronic anxiety, depression, hopelessness, or inner contraction — that is not simply the natural result of difficult circumstances. It is a signal. It is telling you that somewhere in your inner world, at the level of belief, something is misaligned with truth. You are holding a belief — about yourself, about what is possible, about whether you are alone in this, about what God is or is not doing — that is not accurate. And the misalignment is producing the negative emotional state.

It does not mean your circumstances are not real. It does not mean the illness is imaginary or the loss did not happen. It means that the suffering — the inner experience of distress — is not caused directly by the circumstances. It is caused by the beliefs the circumstances are activating. Change the beliefs and the experience of the circumstances transforms — even before the circumstances themselves change.

This is why two people can face identical situations and have completely different inner experiences of them. The circumstances are the same. The beliefs are different. And the beliefs determine the experience.

Finally — and this may be the most important single idea in this chapter — we come to *Simcha*.

*Simcha* is usually translated as joy or happiness. But Rabbi Nachman taught something about *Simcha* that completely reframes what it is and what it means for our inner lives.

*Simcha*, he said, is the measuring rod of *Kedushah* — holiness, spiritual health, genuine connection with God and with truth. Not an optional extra. Not something you feel when things go well. The measuring rod. The indicator of where you actually are.

But here is the crucial nuance: *Simcha* is not a commandment in the way most people think about commandments. You cannot simply decide to feel joy and then feel it. You cannot force *Simcha* into existence by an act of will. And Rashi, the great eleventh-century Torah commentator, makes this precise. On the verse "*v'hayita ach sameach*" — and you will be only joyful — (*Deuteronomy 16:15*), Rashi reads it not as a command but as a *brachah* — a blessing, a natural outcome. Joy is what happens when a person is genuinely aligned with God and with truth. It is promised, not demanded.

Rabbi Nachman is not telling you to perform happiness or paste a smile over your pain. He is saying something more precise and more useful than that. *Simcha* is the outcome of genuine alignment. When a person's *Emunah* is pointed at what is actually true — when the soul's power of acceptance is correctly directed — *Simcha* arises naturally. It is not manufactured. It emerges.

Which means the absence of *Simcha* — the chronic flatness, the depression, the joylessness — is not a spiritual failure. It is information. It is the compass needle swinging. It is telling you: somewhere in here, something is misaligned. Something is accepting as true something that is not actually true. And that false belief is blocking the natural aliveness that is your birthright as a soul.

The work is not to force joy. The work is to find the misalignment. To locate the false belief. To bring it into contact with truth. And when that happens — when *Emunah* is redirected toward what is real — *Simcha* returns on its own. Not because you manufactured it, but because the obstacle to it has been removed.

One more thing before we move forward — because it would be a disservice not to say it plainly.

This is not a sprint.

Everything we are describing in this book — the redirecting of *Emunah*, the dismantling of false beliefs, the rebuilding of the inner world — is a complete reconstruction of identity, perception, and the operating system through which you experience reality. That takes time. It takes consistency. And it requires a particular kind of patience with yourself that most people in pain find extremely difficult to access.

Think of a child learning to walk. The child does not stand up, take three steps, fall, and conclude that walking is not for them. Falling is part of the process. It is how the neurology learns. The child gets up, tries again, falls again, and gradually — through repetition, through accumulated small attempts — something shifts. A new pattern establishes itself. What was effortful becomes natural. What was unsteady becomes the default.

This is precisely how the inner work operates. The old default mode — the neural rubber band that snaps back to familiar patterns of fear, shame, and false belief — has been running for years, sometimes decades. It does not dissolve in an afternoon. But with each conscious return to truth, with each small act of redirecting *Emunah* toward what is real, the new pattern strengthens. Gradually, the new way becomes the baseline. The rubber band loses its snap.

Baby steps. Always baby steps. The direction matters far more than the speed.

## Chapter Two — What You See Is What You Get

There is a principle embedded in the Torah's understanding of the human journey that most people never encounter — and that, once encountered, changes the entire relationship with suffering.

The principle is this: the darkest moments of a person's life are not accidents. They are not punishments. They are not evidence of abandonment. They are, in the Torah's framework, a specific kind of calling. When God wants to bring a person to an encounter they could not have reached any other way — when ordinary circumstances have not been sufficient to open a particular door — He places that person in darkness. Not to destroy them. To force the extraordinary.

This is not a comfortable idea. It is not meant to be. But it is a precise one. And it has enormous practical consequences for how you understand what is happening to you right now.

Because if the darkness is a calling — if it is purposeful, directed, specifically designed for you — then your relationship to it changes completely. You are no longer a victim of circumstance. You are someone being guided, by a very specific route, toward something you could not have reached any other way.

Now let's talk about perception. Because perception is not passive. It is not simply the act of receiving information about the world. Perception is generative. What you see — genuinely, deeply see — shapes what becomes real in your experience.

The Torah makes this explicit in a way that is extraordinary.

In the book of Deuteronomy, God says to the Jewish people: "*Re'eh natati lifanecha hayom et haChayyim v'et hatov, v'et hamavet v'et hara... u'vacharta baChayyim*" — See, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil... and you shall choose life. (*Deuteronomy 30:15, 19*)

The word used is *re'eh* — see. Not *shema* — hear. Not *da* — know. See.

Both options are always present. Life and good, death and evil — not placed before us on alternating days, not available only under certain circumstances. Both are present simultaneously, at every moment, in every situation — including yours right now, wherever you are reading this.

The question is which one do you see.

In every situation, God is telling us, both life and death stand before you. Your choice — the act of choosing life — is not a grand heroic decision made once. It is the ongoing, moment-by-moment question of which one you are focused on. Which one you see. Because what you genuinely see, at the level of your deepest accepted beliefs, is what you activate. And what you activate is what becomes your reality.

This is not wishful thinking dressed in spiritual language. The world reflects back to us what our beliefs are. And God operates with us the same way. If we see His compassion — if we genuinely accept it as real, as available, as extending even to us in our current condition — that is what He shows us. The attribute of mercy — *Rachamim* — becomes operative in our lives. But if we see only judgment — *Din* — if we accept the world as a place of fixed laws and limitations, where things simply are what they are and nothing can change — then we are subject to judgment. Not because God is withholding mercy. Because our perception cannot receive what it does not accept as real.

This makes *Din* — the experience of harshness, constriction, and judgment in life — a diagnostic tool, not a verdict. It is not a sign that God has turned against you. It is a compass reading. It is telling you that the inner lens is not yet aligned with *Rachamim* — and that the alignment is available to you the moment the perception shifts.

The capacity to perceive life and good in every situation is not a passive observation of what is already obvious. It is an active faculty — a discipline of perception that must be cultivated. And when it is operative, it is the very mechanism by which life and good become accessible.

You do not receive life and good and then see them. You see them — and that seeing activates them.

And the inverse is equally true. What you cannot see, you cannot receive. As long as the inner world is oriented toward lack, toward hopelessness, toward the conviction that nothing will change — the outer world will faithfully mirror that orientation back.

Menashe was a king of Israel — and by the Torah's account, one of the most wicked kings in the nation's history. He led the people into terrible sin, filled Jerusalem with bloodshed, and abandoned God entirely. He was, by any measure, a person who had placed himself as far from God as a human being can go.

And then the Assyrians captured him. They bound him in chains. They put him in a boiling cauldron. And in that extremity — in the most unbearable darkness of his life — he began to call out for help.

He called to every idol he had served. Nothing answered.

And then, in desperation, he called to God. But what he said is remarkable. He did not appeal to his own merit — he had none. He did not ask for an exception to be made on his behalf. He made a theological argument. He said: if You save me, You are the true God. And if You do not — then You are like all the others.

What does that mean? It means: if Your mercy is conditional on my behavior — if You can only be compassionate toward someone who has earned it — then Your mercy is limited. And a limited mercy makes You no different from the idols I have been calling to, none of whom could help me. But the prophet Jeremiah wrote from the depths of his own darkness: "*Chasdei Hashem ki lo tamnu, ki lo chalu rachamav*" — the kindnesses of God never cease, for His compassions have not ended. (*Lamentations 3:22*) If that is true — if the compassion is genuinely without end — then it must be available even to someone like me. Not as an exception. As a logical consequence of what infinite actually means.

He was not flattering God. He was calling God to be consistent with His own infinite nature.

The angels heard this prayer and were troubled. They went before God and said: will You receive the prayer of this man — after everything he has done? They blocked it from ascending. (*Sanhedrin 103a*)

And God dug a tunnel beneath His Throne of Glory to receive it directly. (*Sanhedrin 103a; the Talmud reads vaye'ater in Divrei HaYamim II 33:13 as deriving from chater — to dig — yielding this image*) And Menashe was saved.

By recognizing the infinite mercy and giving it voice, he activated it. The channel opened. What was always there became receivable. God dug a tunnel beneath His Throne to meet him precisely where his perception had finally arrived.

Now comes the question the story immediately raises: if God's mercy is truly infinite — if it does not depend on what Menashe did or did not do — why did Menashe have to ask for it at all? Why was it not simply there, flowing toward him regardless? Or to any of us for that matter?

The answer lies in two things God revealed to Moshe at two of the most intimate moments in the Torah — each one illuminating a different face of the same truth.

The first was at the burning bush. When Moshe stood before the fire that burned but did not consume, and God spoke to him for the first time, Moshe asked: who are You? What is Your name? How shall I describe You to the people? And God answered with a name unlike any other: “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*” — I will be what I will be. (Exodus 3:14)

This is not a riddle. It is a precise description of how God interacts with us. *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* — I will be what I will be — means: the face through which I meet you is not fixed in advance. I will be, for you, what you are capable of receiving from Me. You determine the face. The attribute God turns toward you — judgment or mercy — is yours to determine. Not the choice of your circumstances. The choice of your perception. The choice of how you see.

The second came years later, at an extraordinary moment after the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe — having brought the people back from the brink of annihilation — made his most audacious request: “*Har’eini na et kevodecha*” — show me Your glory. (Exodus 33:18) Let me see You as You truly are. And in that revelation, God declared: “*V’chanoti et asher achon, v’richamti et asher arachem*” — I will show grace to those I show grace to, and I will have mercy on those I have mercy on. (Exodus 33:19)

Read this carefully. This is not God saying He plays favorites arbitrarily. He is describing a law. I will show grace to — whom? To those I show grace to. I will have mercy on — whom? On those I have mercy on. In other words: those who perceive Him as gracious, who orient themselves toward His mercy, who open themselves to receive it — those are the ones who receive it. The mercy was always there. Infinite. Inexhaustible. What changes is not His mercy. What changes is what you bring to the encounter. Those who see Him as merciful activate His mercy. Those who experience Him through the lens of judgment — who have not yet opened to the truth that mercy is available to them — remain under judgment. Not because He withheld it. Because their inner world could not receive what it did not accept as real.

Both verses are saying the same thing from different angles. *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*: the attribute you encounter is the attribute you are capable of receiving. *V’chanoti et asher achon*: the mercy you receive is the mercy you have opened yourself to receive. The channel is always open. The question is which side of it you are standing on.

Between every stimulus and our response to it, there is a space. It is subtle — most people never notice it — but it is where everything actually happens. In that space live our beliefs. And those beliefs color the stimulus before we ever consciously experience it. We do not respond to reality itself. We respond to how we see reality. And how we see reality is always filtered through the lens of what we already accept to be true.

The mercy was infinite. It was always available. But as long as a person's lens cannot receive it — as long as the belief says it does not extend this far, that it is not available for someone like me — or worse, God forbid, that God does not exist, or that God does not care about me or about human beings in general — the channel remains closed. Not because God closed it. Because the perception cannot receive what it does not accept as real.

The moment a person opens up to a new perception, a new way of seeing things, just being open to it — and especially if you articulate it — the channel opens. What was always available becomes receivable.

So Menashe, by articulating this truth — that God's mercy is infinite — he activated it in his life. The channel that had been closed not by God but by the limits of his own perception opened the moment his perception shifted. God dug a tunnel beneath His Throne to meet him precisely where his seeing had finally arrived.

We cannot always change our circumstances. We cannot force healing to arrive on our schedule. We cannot undo what has happened or control what will happen next. But we can change the lens. We can shift the beliefs that are coloring the stimulus before we experience it. And when the lens changes — when the belief shifts toward what is actually true — what was always available becomes receivable.

We are never trapped by reality. We are only ever trapped by how we see it.

And now go back to where we began.

Both are always there. Life and good. Death and evil. Present simultaneously, at every moment, in every situation. The question is never which one is available. The question is which one you are seeing.

Because what you genuinely accept and see — at the level of your deepest beliefs — is what you activate. When you see life and good — when your perception is genuinely oriented toward the truth that God's mercy is infinite, that the darkness is purposeful,

that healing is possible — you activate life and good. When you see death and evil — when the lens of fear and hopelessness filters everything — you activate that instead.

God's mercy is not under God's control alone. This is your free choice. Not the choice of your circumstances. The choice of your perception. This is precisely what God was telling us at the burning bush: "I will be what I will be." He is telling us that we choose which attribute He meets us with. Judgment or mercy. That choosing is the whole of our free will.

Think of it as a bridge. On one side stands *Din* — the experience of a world run by natural laws, of constriction and judgment. On the other side stands *Rachamim* — the experience of a world run by the word of God, of love and mercy. Walking your belief system across that bridge — step by step, baby step by baby step — is the entire journey. Each step is small. The cumulative effect is total transformation.

*U'vacharta baChayyim* — and you shall choose life.

Now you know what that means.

Now there remains one more thing to address — and it is the thing that makes all of this so difficult.

Mark Twain observed: it is easy to deceive a man, but nearly impossible to convince a man he has been deceived.

The false beliefs we carry about ourselves, about God, about what is possible for us — they do not feel like false beliefs. They feel like accurate assessments of reality. They feel like the obvious truth about our situation. The person who believes they are beyond healing does not experience that as a belief. They experience it as a fact. The person who believes God has forgotten them does not experience that as a misalignment. They experience it as the plain evidence of their life.

King Solomon takes this even further. He writes in Proverbs: "*Kol derech ish yashar b'evinav*" — all the ways of a man are right in his own eyes. (*Proverbs 21:2*) And if that were not enough, he repeats it: "*Kol derech ish zach b'evinav*" — all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. (*Proverbs 16:2*) The repetition is deliberate. He is driving this home with everything he has. What King Solomon is telling us — in its fullest and most sobering expression — is that the most wicked person does not commit the most wicked act while seeing it as wicked. He sees it as justified. As correct. As the reasonable thing to do given his circumstances. And this has enormous significance for every one of us —

because we are included in that statement. It means that everything we already believe always looks right to us. The false belief does not announce itself as false. It presents itself as obvious truth. And that is precisely why the work of truth-seeking is not a comfortable intellectual exercise. It requires a genuine willingness to consider that the lens we are looking through may not be showing us what is actually there.

This is the deepest cruelty of the World of Falsehood we described in the previous chapter. It does not announce itself as falsehood. It presents itself as reality. The concealment is so thorough that the thing being concealed — the availability of mercy, the possibility of healing, the presence of God in the darkness — is not experienced as hidden. It is experienced as absent.

And this is precisely why the work is not simply intellectual. You cannot think your way out of a false belief by recognizing it is false. The belief has to be met at the level where it lives — at the level of genuine inner seeing, of *Emunah* redirected, of the capacity to perceive what is actually there rather than what the fear insists is true.

The ego protects its worldview fiercely. It cannot afford to be wrong — because if the belief system collapses, the entire constructed sense of reality collapses with it. This is why *Anavah* — humility — is not simply a virtue on the spiritual path. It is a prerequisite for healing. Humility is the willingness to consider that the lens through which you have been seeing your life may not be showing you what is actually there. That willingness — even just the crack of it, the small opening of maybe I am not seeing this correctly — is the beginning of everything.

That is the work this book is about.

And it begins — as Menashe showed us from inside a boiling cauldron — with the willingness to turn toward what you cannot yet fully see, and to give it voice.

# Chapter Three — The Wound Beneath the Wound

There is something that no healing modality tells you — and it is the reason so many of them fail.

It does not matter what treatment you pursue, what protocol you follow, what supplement you take, what therapy you begin. As long as your body is locked in a state of chronic stress — as long as your nervous system is running in what science calls fight-or-flight — chronic stress severely impairs healing and immune function, sometimes to the point that no treatment can reach the root. The city's rebuilding mechanisms are shut down.

Here is why. Imagine a city under siege. The moment the enemy surrounds the walls, everything changes. Schools shut down. Businesses close. Ordinary life stops completely. Every available resource — every person, every supply, every unit of energy — is redirected toward one purpose: survival. The city is no longer growing, building, educating, or healing. It is only defending.

Your body works exactly the same way. When it believes it is in danger — when the nervous system receives the signal that a threat is present — it goes into fight-or-flight. All available energy is redirected away from digestion, immune function, cellular repair, and healing, and sent instead to the outer limbs, the heart, the muscles — everything you would need if you had to fight or run. This is a brilliant and necessary survival mechanism. When real danger is present, you need it.

The problem is when the danger is not real. When it is a memory of past trauma, a fear about the future, a subconscious belief that the world is a dangerous place — the mind cannot tell the difference. It responds to perceived danger exactly as it responds to actual danger. The city goes into siege mode regardless of whether the enemy at the gates is real or imagined.

The body has two primary operating modes. The first is fight-or-flight — the sympathetic nervous system engaged, stress hormones flooding the body, healing suppressed, immune function suppressed, growth and repair switched off. The second is rest-and-digest — the parasympathetic nervous system engaged, the body returned to

its natural baseline, immune function restored, cellular repair restored. This is the state in which healing happens. Only in this state. There is no version of healing that occurs while the city is under siege.

The problem is that most people who are suffering chronically — whether from illness, from financial pressure, from relationship pain, from the accumulated weight of a life that has been hard — are not experiencing occasional siege. They are experiencing permanent siege. Their nervous system has been in fight-or-flight for months. For years. Sometimes for decades. And in that state, no treatment can do what it promises. The city's rebuilding mechanisms are permanently shut down.

So the first question is not: what treatment should I try? The first question is: what is keeping me locked in this state? And what will get me out?

The Torah has a precise answer to both questions. And it has had it for thousands of years.

The engine of fight-or-flight is fear.

Not always dramatic, identifiable fear. More often the low-grade, chronic, barely-conscious fear that hums beneath daily life. The fear that things will not work out. That you are not enough. That the illness will not lift. That help is not coming. That you are fundamentally alone in this.

And the inverse of fear — the state that lifts the siege and returns the body to its healing baseline — is trust. Specifically, in the Torah's framework, trust in God. Not as a vague spiritual sentiment. As a lived, operational orientation toward reality — the genuine acceptance that He is the cause of all causes, that what is happening is purposeful, that you are held even when everything feels like it is falling apart.

This is not a metaphor. The shift from fear to trust produces a measurable, physiological change in the body. The stress hormones recede. The immune system reactivates. The cellular repair mechanisms come back online. The siege is lifted. The city begins to rebuild.

And here is the positive side of this equation that is easy to miss: joy, gratitude, and genuine inner peace do not merely remove the obstacles to healing — they actively activate it. Joy and positive emotional states switch on immune function, cellular growth, and repair in ways that no treatment can replicate from the outside. The body

in a state of genuine trust and aliveness is a body that is healing. Not as a side effect — as a direct expression of its natural design.

But where does the chronic fear come from? Why does it run so persistently, so quietly, so continuously — even in people who would not describe themselves as particularly anxious or afraid?

The answer takes us back to everything we established in the previous chapter.

A person living inside the World of Falsehood — who has not yet learned to see through the concealment, is experiencing a world that appears cruel, random, and out of control. They are seeing, at the level of their deepest accepted beliefs, death and evil rather than life and good. Not necessarily in a dramatic way. But at the background level of their *Nefesh* — their inner programming — the world feels like a place where bad things happen without purpose, where the next difficulty is always around the corner, where nothing is truly safe.

And a nervous system living inside that world has no choice but to respond accordingly. It goes on permanent alert. It scans the environment constantly for the next threat — because in the world it believes it is living in, threats are inevitable. A bill arrives and triggers a cascade of fear entirely disproportionate to the bill itself — because the bill is not just a bill. It is confirmation of a worldview that says: danger is always coming. A symptom appears and the body floods with alarm — not just about the symptom, but about everything the symptom seems to confirm about the nature of life.

This is not weakness. This is the body being perfectly faithful to what the *Nefesh* — the soul's operational layer, the level where beliefs and programming live — believes. If you genuinely see a dangerous world — if death and evil are what your lens brings into focus — your body will live as though you are in danger. Continuously. Exhaustingly. Without relief.

The fight-or-flight is not the root problem. It is the faithful physiological output of a false belief that has been running for a very long time. Address the output without addressing the belief, and nothing will permanently change. Which is why so many treatments help temporarily and then stop working. They are addressing the screen. The programming continues to run.

This brings us to where suffering actually originates — and the answer may surprise you.

And it is here — at the level of the *Nefesh*, the soul's belief layer — that suffering has its deepest roots.

This runs counter to everything most people assume about their pain. We assume that suffering lives in the body — that if we can fix what is happening physically, the pain will resolve. But the body is where suffering shows up. The root runs deeper. We assume the circumstances are what generate the distress. We assume that if the outside situation improved — if the diagnosis changed, if the financial pressure lifted, if the difficult relationship resolved — the inner suffering would resolve along with it.

But the evidence of countless lives tells a different story. People whose circumstances improve dramatically and who remain just as anxious, just as depressed, just as unwell. People whose circumstances are genuinely terrible and who carry an inexplicable inner peace. The circumstances are not the source. The beliefs are the source. And the beliefs live in the *Nefesh*.

Here is how it works. Beliefs generate emotional states. The belief that I am alone generates the emotion of fear. The belief that nothing will change generates the emotion of despair. The belief that I am not worthy of healing generates the emotion of shame. These are not reactions to what is happening — they are outputs of what is believed.

And emotional states generate physiological responses. Fear activates fight-or-flight — the city goes under siege. Despair suppresses the immune system. Shame contracts the body. The physiology is not the origin — it is the expression of what is happening at the level of belief.

Stated as a clean sequence: beliefs generate emotional states, emotional states generate physiological responses, and physiological responses generate health or disease. Follow that chain to its end and you arrive at the body — not as the origin of the problem, but as its expression.

Which means that illness — chronic illness in particular — is almost never simply a physical phenomenon. It is a physical expression of something running at a deeper level. The body is the screen. The *Nefesh* is the programmer.

To make this vivid, consider a simple example.

It begins to rain.

In one part of the world, a farmer looks up at the sky and feels a wave of relief. The crops have been dry for weeks. This rain is life. His body relaxes. His breathing deepens. Something in him opens.

In another part of the world, a family looks up at the same rain and feels dread. The roof leaks. The children cannot play outside. The commute will be miserable. Their bodies tighten. Their stress hormones rise.

Same stimulus. Same rain. Opposite physiological responses.

What is the difference? Not the rain. The beliefs. The framework through which the stimulus is received. For the farmer, rain means life — and the body responds to life with opening. For the family, rain means trouble — and the body responds to trouble with contraction.

The stimulus is never the cause. The belief about the stimulus is the cause. And the body faithfully produces the physiological correlate of whatever the belief generates.

Now consider what happens when this system runs chronically in the wrong direction.

A person is ill. The illness generates fear. That fear activates fight-or-flight — the siege begins. The siege suppresses the immune system and the healing mechanisms. The suppression of healing allows the illness to deepen or persist. The deepening illness generates more fear. More fear means a deeper siege. A deeper siege means less healing. Less healing means more illness.

And then something else sets in. The person is not only ill — they are not functioning. They cannot do what they used to do. They feel like a burden. The self-judgment arrives. The shame. The despair. Each of these generates its own physiological suppression. The spiral turns inward and downward, each rotation tightening the grip of the one before it.

This is what the Torah calls *metzumtzam* — constricted. Squeezed. Trapped. It is the same word embedded in the name *Mitzrayim* — Egypt — whose name comes from *metzarim*, constriction. The exile was not only a physical captivity. It was this state — the inner contraction so complete, the fight-or-flight so chronic, that when Moshe came with the message of redemption, the Torah tells us they could not receive it. "*V'lo sham'u el Moshe mikotzer ruach umei'avodah kashah*" — they could not hear Moshe because of the constriction of their spirit and the crushing labor. (*Exodus 6:9*)

The constriction came before the inability to hear. The state of chronic fear closed the channel through which the message of liberation was trying to reach them.

This is the death spiral of chronic suffering. And it is exactly where many people reading this book find themselves right now. Not because they have failed. Not because healing is unavailable to them. But because the spiral has been running long enough that getting out of it feels impossible from the inside.

Before we address how to get out, there is something that needs to be said about what it means to be in it. Because the reframe available here is not a consolation — it is theology.

The ancient Sages describe the period immediately preceding the Messianic era as *Chevlei Moshiach* — literally, the birth contractions of Moshiach. The image is precise: these are not random suffering, not punishment, not meaningless pain. They are labor pains. The contractions of a birth.

And who feels those contractions?

The mother. The one carrying the child. Not everyone around her. Not the neighbors, not the bystanders. The mother — the one whose body is doing the work of bringing something new into the world.

The same principle applies here. Not everyone carries the *Chevlei Moshiach*. Look around at the genuinely good, spiritually sensitive people in this era — they are hurting. The ones who feel most deeply, who are most attuned to what is real, who carry the most — they are the ones in the most pain. This is not coincidence. It is the pain of carrying the birth of something new. Of being the ones whose inner world is being forged into the vessel that the coming era requires.

If you are suffering with inexplicable, treatment-resistant pain in this period — if nothing the world has offered has reached the root — you may be carrying part of that birth. Not as consolation. As theology. The pain is real. But it is purposeful, and it belongs to a larger story whose ending is *Geulah* — redemption.

This does not answer the question of why we must suffer. That is a separate and deep conversation. But it answers the question of what is happening — and it recontextualizes the suffering entirely. Not abandonment. Participation.

The wound beneath the wound is always a belief.

Not the illness. Not the circumstances. Not the diagnosis. The belief about what the illness means, about what God is or is not doing, about whether healing is possible for someone like you, about whether the world is a place of mercy or a place of threat.

Find that belief. Bring it into contact with truth. And the healing that was always available — but could not reach you while chronic fear had the siege in place — begins to flow.

How do you find it? How do you change it? How do you turn the ship around from inside the spiral when the spiral itself makes everything feel impossible?

That is what the rest of this book is for.

# Chapter Four — The Voice in Your Head Is Not You

We have covered a lot of ground together. We have talked about the world of concealment, about perception and how it activates reality, about the beliefs running in the inner programming of the soul — that generate the emotional states that generate the physical states.

But there is something we have not yet addressed directly — and without addressing it, all the tools in the world will only partially work. Because there is a force operating inside you that is actively working against every step you try to take.

Not outside you. Inside you.

And the reason it has gone largely unaddressed is that it has been hiding in plain sight for your entire life — disguised as something you would never think to question.

Your own thoughts.

I remember learning about the *Yetzer HaRa* — the inner adversary, the force of self-destruction built into the human psyche — as a small child in school. My teacher described it as a force that would come and try to get me to do bad things. And I remember thinking, with the absolute confidence of a young child: when that *Yetzer HaRa* shows up, I am going to punch him in the nose.

Of course, he never showed up. Not the way I imagined. Not as something separate from me, something I could identify and confront across a clear line.

He was there the whole time. Disguised as my own voice.

This is the *Yetzer HaRa*'s entire strategy — and it is devastatingly effective. By passing itself off as your own thoughts, your own internal monologue, your own honest assessment of yourself and the world, it goes completely unnoticed. You do not fight it because you do not recognize it as something to fight. You integrate it into your identity. You own it. You say: this is how I think. This is who I am. This is the truth about my situation.

And the moment you do that — the moment you claim the voice as yours — it has you.

This phenomenon is not unique to the Jewish tradition. In our times, writers like Eckhart Tolle have called it the "pain body" — the accumulated weight of unprocessed negative emotion and thought that lives inside a person and speaks in their voice. Other traditions have given it other names — like the inner critic, and others. But the recognition across cultures is the same: there is something inside the human being that is not the human being, that feeds on suffering, and that maintains its power by being mistaken for the self.

The Torah identified this reality thousands of years ago — and gave us the map for what to do about it.

Let us be specific about what this voice says. Because it is not subtle.

It says: you are not enough. You will never get better. Nobody really cares. Things are not going to change. You are a burden. You have no value. They are going to laugh at you. This is just how your life is. You brought this on yourself.

It says these things in your own voice, in your own cadence, with your own specific vocabulary, drawing on your own specific Memories. It is perfectly customized. And it runs continuously — in the background of every waking hour — like a program that was installed long ago and has been running ever since without your knowing it was there.

And this is not accidental. Notice that most people, if left to their own natural default, do not wake up in the morning with their mind telling them: you are wonderful, you have this, things are going to work out beautifully. The default setting of the unguarded mind is negative. It notices what is lacking, what is wrong, what is threatening, what is not working. It is always scanning for danger. This is not a character flaw in the people who experience it. It is the nature of a mind that has been running under the influence of this inner voice — a voice whose entire orientation is toward the negative because the negative is what it feeds on.

What suppresses you strengthens it. Your contraction is its expansion. Your despair is its food. You are on a seesaw together: either you are up and it is down, or it is up and you are down. There is no neutral position. And it knows this. Which is why it works so hard to keep you down.

What emerges from all of this is that the perception of death and evil is the default position. You do not need to choose it. It is chosen for you — automatically, by the simple act of not actively seeking truth and not actively choosing life. The seesaw does not rest in the middle. The moment you stop pushing toward one side, gravity takes it to the other. This is why God does not say “choose life, and also don’t choose death” — He says only “choose life.” Because death requires no choice. It is what happens when you are not choosing life.

This is war. And the first rule of war is knowing who the enemy is.

Now here is something important to clarify — because it is easy to misunderstand what we mean when we talk about the World of Falsehood we discussed in Chapter One.

The world itself is not an illusion. Reality is real. The rabbis are not telling us that physical existence is a dream to be dismissed. They are telling us something far more precise and far more useful.

What makes this world a World of Falsehood is not the world itself. It is the voice. It is the inner narrative — the running commentary of the *Yetzer HaRa* — that lays itself like a film over reality and colors everything we see. The fear, the shame, the hopelessness, the distorted beliefs about who we are and what is possible — these are not reality. They are the voice's interpretation of reality. And we have been living inside that interpretation for so long that we have mistaken it for the thing itself.

This inner voice is nothing less than an extension of what the Torah calls the *Nachash Hakadmon* — the primordial serpent of the Garden of Eden — whose lies were the origin of the World of Falsehood in the first place. In Chapter One we established that the sin did not begin with the eating. It began with the believing. The serpent planted false beliefs into the deepest layer of human consciousness. And the *Yetzer HaRa* — this inner voice — is the mechanism by which those original lies continue to run in every subsequent generation. It is the *Nachash* speaking from inside.

Which means that dismantling its hold — learning to recognize its voice as separate from your own — is not merely a psychological exercise. It is the reversal of the original exile. It is the beginning of the return.

The first move in this reversal is also the most important one. And it requires nothing more than a shift in understanding.

The voice is not you.

Not your voice. Not your honest assessment. Not your inner truth. Not even your subconscious mind expressing what you really feel. It is a separate entity — using your internal broadcast system, speaking in your frequencies, drawing on your memories — but it is not you.

You are the *Neshamah* — the soul — that is inhabiting this body and this mind. The word *Neshamah*, as we will establish in the following chapter, shares its root with *Neshimah* — breath. It is the divine breath that God breathed into Adam's nostrils at the moment of creation. It is the real you. The observer. The one who watches. And the voice is something the soul is hosting — something that has, over years and decades of going unnoticed, taken up so much space that it feels indistinguishable from the self.

But it is not.

This is what the Torah calls *Galut* — exile. The Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, comes from the word *metzarim* — constriction. The exile was not primarily a geographic condition. It was this: the enslavement of the soul to a voice it had mistaken for itself — pulled wherever it wants to go, with no sense of being the captain of your own ship. And *Geulah* — redemption, liberation — begins not with a change of circumstances but with the moment the soul recognizes it is not the slave it has been told it is.

The moment you understand this — genuinely, not just intellectually — something changes. A space opens. And that space is everything. Because that space, between you and the voice, is the playing field. It is where the entire inner work takes place.

And here is the destination worth keeping in view: the goal is not to destroy the *Yetzer HaRa*. On higher, achievable levels, he becomes your servant — his energy redirected toward assisting the soul on its mission, rather than working against you. The force that was tearing you down begins to serve the soul's purposes. But that transformation can only begin when you first recognize him as separate from you. You cannot redirect it as long as you believe it to be you.

In different traditions this move is called by different names. Some call it releasing — simply letting go. Others call it witnessing. The Torah calls it the work of *Tahara* — purity, as it relates to the soul.

*Tahara* means the absence of impurity — achieved through separation, the process of pulling apart what has been mixed together.

Think of gold. Pure gold is simply gold — nothing else mixed in. The moment you introduce another metal, another substance, another element, it is no longer pure. It is not that the gold has changed or been destroyed. It has simply become mixed with something that is not gold. And the process of purification is the process of separating out what does not belong — removing the foreign elements until only the gold remains.

The soul works the same way. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge — the *Eitz HaDa'at* — the Torah tells us that the *ra*, the destructive force, became *ma'urav* — mixed — with the *tov*, the good. What had been separate became enmeshed. The *Neshamah* — the pure gold of the soul — became confused and tangled up with the ego's voice. The observer became identified with the observed. The soul began to mistake the body's inner commentary for its own essential nature.

*Tahara* — purity — is the undoing of that mixture. The careful, patient, ongoing process of separating what is really you from what has been layered on top of you. Separating the gold from the foreign elements. Separating the soul from the voice. Separating the falsehood from the truth.

This is not a one-time event. It is a practice. *La'at la'at* — gradually, little by little, step by step. You do not undo decades of enmeshment in an afternoon. But each moment of genuine separation — each moment in which you recognize the voice as something you are observing rather than something you are — weakens its hold a little. And the cumulative effect of many such moments is profound.

As the Talmud teaches: "*Ha-ba litaher — mesayim oto*" — one who comes to purify himself, they assist him from Above. (*Yoma 38b*) The moment you turn toward this work, you do not turn alone.

Now here is how you actually do this — not in theory, but in practice, in the middle of the moment when the voice has you in its grip.

When the negative emotion floods in — the fear, the shame, the despair, the hopelessness — instead of following it into the thinking, instead of getting pulled into the story the voice wants to tell, you step back. You become the observer.

You are not your anger — you are the one observing the anger. You are not your shame — you are the one noticing the shame. You are not your fear — you are the one aware of the fear.

You say to yourself: look what I am feeling right now. Not I am feeling this. Look what I am feeling. The observer, looking at the feeling. Not being the feeling itself.

You do not try to stop the feeling. You do not argue with the voice. You do not attempt to replace the negative thought with a positive one. You simply observe. You put your attention on the emotion as a separate thing — something you are watching, not something you are being.

And as soon as you do — as soon as that space opens between you and it — its energy begins to drain. Because it was running on your identification with it. The moment you withdraw that identification, the power source is cut.

There is a verse in *Tehillim* — the Book of Psalms — that describes exactly this phenomenon. It says:

"*Od me'at v'ein rasha, v'hitbonanta al mekomo v'einenu*" — yet a little more, and the wicked one is gone; you will contemplate deeply on his place, and he will not be there. (*Psalms 37:10*)

Now look carefully at this verse. If it is talking about a physical enemy — a real person, a *rasha*, a wicked man — it makes no sense. You look at someone's place and he is not there? If he is not there — then it is not his place. And more than that: why does the verse use the word *hitbonanta* — which means to contemplate deeply, to meditate inwardly — rather than simply *ra'ita* — you looked? If you are looking for a person in a physical location, you look. You do not meditate. The use of *hitbonanta* — deep inner contemplation — tells us something crucial: this verse is not talking about an external enemy. It is talking about something inside.

The *rasha* — the wicked force — is the inner adversary. The *Yetzer HaRa*. The voice. And the instruction is: turn your deep, conscious inner attention onto it. Look at it directly, from the inside, as an observer. And *v'einenu* — you will find it is not there. It has no real substance. No real *mamashut* — no genuine existence independent of your attention and identification.

*Od me'at* — just a little more. A little more awareness. A little more conscious observation. And it dissolves.

Because it was never really there. We have been controlled by a phantom. A program running on borrowed energy — the energy of our own belief, our own identification, our own investment in its version of reality.

Withdraw the investment, and it collapses.

The *Neshamah's* — the soul's — superpower is consciousness. Awareness. The capacity to place attention where it chooses rather than where the voice directs it.

The *Yetzer HaRa's* entire survival depends on going unnoticed — on operating beneath the threshold of awareness. It is like a thief who can only work in darkness. The moment the light of conscious attention falls on it directly, it loses its power. It cannot survive being seen clearly for what it is.

This is why developing the habit of observation — of stepping back, of noticing, of watching the inner world rather than being absorbed by it — is not simply a psychological technique. It is the primary spiritual discipline of a soul working its way toward freedom.

And the *Emunah* — the faculty of acceptance — that we described in Chapter One is also the soul's most powerful weapon here. Because the voice survives entirely on what you accept as true. Every lie it tells you has power only to the extent that you invest your faculty of acceptance in it. When you recognize the voice as separate and refuse to own its assessment — when you stop accepting its version of you as your truth — you are withdrawing your *Emunah* from falsehood and redirecting it toward what is real.

You are not generating new belief. You are reclaiming misplaced belief. And the thing that was sustained by that misplaced belief begins, *la'at la'at* — gradually, step by step — to starve.

This is the beginning of freedom. Not the arrival. The beginning.

Little by little, the space between you and the voice grows. The observer becomes more stable. The voice becomes less automatic. The soul — the real you, the one that was always there beneath the noise — begins to have more room.

It does not happen overnight. But it begins the moment you understand, genuinely and completely, that single liberating truth:

The voice in your head is not you.

## Chapter Five — The Great Exchange

Everything we have discussed so far — the World of Falsehood, the power of perception, the beliefs running in the inner programming of the soul, the death spiral of chronic fight-or-flight, the inner voice — all of it points toward a single underlying reality that we now need to address directly.

Because underneath all of it, there is a case of mistaken identity.

And until that mistaken identity is understood and corrected, everything else is surface work.

Let us go back to the very beginning. To the Garden of Eden — and to what actually happened there.

We have been told the story many times. Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. That is the sin. That is where it all went wrong.

But look more carefully at the text and you will see something that changes the entire picture.

Before Eve ate, the Torah tells us she saw that the tree was good for eating. (*Genesis 3:6*) But God had told them clearly: "*Beyom achalcha mimenu mot tamut*" — on the day you eat from it, you shall surely die. (*Genesis 2:17*) How could she now see it as good for eating? How does something God described as deadly suddenly look desirable?

Because something had already shifted. Before the eating, the seeing had already changed. And the seeing changed because the believing had already changed.

The serpent — the *Nachash* — had slithered into her mind and planted a series of lies. And she integrated them. She swallowed them. And once those lies were absorbed at the deepest level of her consciousness, her perception shifted accordingly. She now saw through a different lens — and through that lens, the tree looked good.

The eating was not the main part of the sin. It was the inevitable consequence of the first and main part of the sin, which is believing the lies. The *Nachash* had already done his work before a single fruit was touched.

What is the poison of the serpent — the *zuhama shel nachash* that the Kabbalistic tradition speaks of? It is not venom in the biological sense. It is lies. Foundational,

carefully constructed lies planted into the deepest layer of human consciousness — lies about God, about the self, about the nature of reality. Lies that, once integrated, distort everything a person sees and experiences from that point forward. They are the root of the World of Falsehood. The origin point of the great confusion.

Rashi — the great eleventh-century Torah commentator — identifies one of those foundational lies explicitly. The *Nachash* told Eve that God was keeping the fruit from her because He was threatened by her — that eating would make her like God, and that was precisely why God forbade it. In other words: God is not loving. He is adversarial. He is protecting His own position at your expense. That single lie — the seed of the belief that God is a competitor rather than a Creator, a threat rather than a source of love — is the wound beneath every other wound. From that root, every other distortion of human consciousness grows.

And that confusion has been running in human beings ever since.

Now let us look at what the Torah tells us happened after the eating.

"*Vayipakchu einei shneihem*" — and the eyes of both of them were opened. (*Genesis 3:7*)

Was this an elevation or a fall? Clearly a fall. But what does it mean that their eyes opened?

The standard reading of this verse is straightforward: the eyes of both of them — Adam's and Eve's — were opened together. That is the plain meaning, and it is how the verse is almost universally understood.

But look more carefully at the precise language. The Torah does not say *einehem* — their eyes. It says *einei shneihem* — the two eyes. This distinction, noticed by the deeper commentators, opens a different reading entirely — and it is the reading that unlocks the full depth of what the fall actually was.

The soul sees with one eye — the eye of unity, the perception that beneath all of existence there is one Source, one cause, one God. The body sees with two eyes — the eyes of duality, dividing everything into pairs: good and bad, pleasant and painful, self and other. The tree of good and evil.

Before the sin, Adam and Eve saw through the soul's singular seeing. The body was a *lavush* — a garment, a vessel through which the soul navigated the world. They were not unaware of their nakedness because they were naive. They were unaware because

nakedness is a body concept — and they were living from the soul. The body was clothing. The soul was the wearer.

After the sin: the two eyes of the body opened. And as those eyes opened, the soul's single eye dimmed. With the opening of those two eyes came the experience of a divided world — a world of opposites, of conflict, of self set against other. Identity collapsed from the soul's unity into the body's duality. And the first thing those two eyes noticed? That they were naked. Because nakedness — self-consciousness, the awareness of oneself as a separate physical object in a world of other separate physical objects — is precisely what the body's two eyes see when they look at themselves.

And here the Torah gives us a glimpse of what it looks like when that poison temporarily lifts. When the Jewish people stood at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the Talmud tells us something extraordinary: *paskah zuhumatam* — their *zuhamah* ceased. (*Shabbat 146a; Yevamot 103b*) The *zuhamah* — the very same word. The same toxin that entered human consciousness through the serpent in the Garden, the poison that caused the body's two eyes to open and the soul's singular seeing to dim — at Sinai, for that moment, it lifted. And Rashi, commenting on the verse that describes Israel camped at the mountain — *vayichan sham Yisrael*, using the singular form — says they were *k'ish echad b'lev echad* — like one man with one heart. (*Rashi on Exodus 19:2*) When the body's two eyes — the eyes of division, of self versus other, of duality — were no longer operating, what did they see? They saw that all of them were one. One soul. One being. One heart. Because that is the truth the soul's singular eye reveals: at the level of the soul, we are not separate. The division belongs to the body's paradigm. The unity belongs to the soul's. The moment the *zuhamah* lifted, they stopped seeing through the lens of separation and began — briefly, collectively, at the highest moment in Jewish history — to see as the soul sees.

This was the original shift — from soul-centered perception to body-centered perception. From soul as self to body as self. And it was not only a historical event. It is the condition every human being is born into. We come into this world already identified with the body, already seeing through the body's eyes, already living the consequences of that original exchange.

Before the sin, Adam had a body of light — *ohr* spelled with an *Aleph*, the letter of the infinite. He could perceive the inner essence of every creature and name them from that seeing. After the sin, the garment of light became a garment of skin — *or* spelled with an *Ayin* — eye. (In Hebrew, the letter *Ayin*, when spelled out in full, is also the

Hebrew word for eye. The letter and the organ share the same name — a clue hidden in the language itself.) The ego's eye. One letter. The entire fall.

Now God placed two guardians at the entrance to the Garden to block the path back to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life. One is the *Kruvim* — the Cherubim — which we will return to in full in a later chapter. The other is the *Cherev HaMithapechet* — the Turning Sword.

This is a strange guardian. A sword that turns — *mithapechet*, from the same root as *v'nahafoch hu*, the great reversal, the upside-down. A turning, inverting, revolving sword.

But if you step back and think about it, several questions arise. No one has returned to the physical Garden since the expulsion — so what exactly is being guarded? And God Himself tells us that the Torah is the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life: "*Eitz chayyim hi l'machazikim bah*" — it is a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it. (*Proverbs 3:18*) If God wants us to hold fast to the Torah, why would He protect the path to it? And God never told Adam and Eve they could not eat from the *Eitz HaChayyim* — only from the *Eitz HaDa'at*, the Tree of Knowledge. So what exactly is being protected, and from what?

The answer is that this is not a physical description. The Garden, the Tree, the sword — these are spiritual realities. And the *Cherev HaMithapechet* — the Turning Sword — is the great inversion itself. The confusion of inside and outside. The mistaking of the body for the self. The reversal of cause and effect.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov — the great eighteenth-century master — told a story called The Exchanged Children. I will give you the essence of it.

A king and one of his servants had children born on the same day in the palace. The midwife, seized by a strange impulse, switched the children. The true prince — the king's son — grew up as a servant. The servant's child grew up as the prince, raised in the palace, treated as royalty, given every privilege of the throne.

The story follows the true prince through his long journey of awakening — the gradual recognition that he is not who he has been told he is, that the servant's life he is living is not his life, that his true identity is royal. Eventually, after great struggle, he reclaims his place. And the false prince — the servant's child who had been ruling — returns to his proper role as servant.

The interpretation writes itself.

The son of the King is the soul — the *Neshamah*. We are, as the Torah tells us, literally the children of God — "*Banim atem l'Hashem Elokeichem*" — you are children of God your Creator. (*Deuteronomy 14:1*) The servant is the body, whose entire purpose is to serve the soul, to help the soul navigate this world and fulfill its mission.

The exchange: the soul began to identify as the body. The true prince forgot who he was. And in that forgetting, the servant took over — the body, now in the position of authority, using the soul to pursue its own agenda: pleasure, ego-satisfaction, the things the body desires. Instead of the body serving the soul, the soul was pressed into the service of the body.

This is the *Cherev HaMithapechet*. This is the upside-down. The true prince living as a servant. The servant living as a prince. And the path back to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — to inner Torah, to healing, to the consciousness of the soul — blocked by this confusion of identity until the true prince wakes up and begins to reclaim his throne.

Now let us understand what the body's rule actually looks like — because you are living inside it right now, and it is so familiar it feels like reality itself.

From the body's perspective — from the ego's paradigm — the world works like this: things happen to me, and I respond. Someone says something unkind, and I feel hurt. The illness does not improve, and I feel hopeless. The finances do not resolve, and I feel afraid. The world generates the stimuli and I react to them. My inner state is the product of my outer circumstances. Change the circumstances and I will feel better inside.

Pain is bad. Pleasure is good.

This is the operating system most human beings run on their entire lives. And it feels completely true — because from inside the body's eyes, it is what reality looks like.

But it is upside down.

The soul's perspective is the precise inverse. From the soul's vantage point: the outer world is not the cause of my inner state — it is a mirror of it. The experiences that come to me are not random events I am subject to. They are messages — communications from God, pointing me toward what lives inside me that needs to be addressed. The painful experience is not an attack. It is a teacher. And the teaching is always about the inner world — the beliefs, the emotions, the programming running in the inner self.

Pain is a teacher. Suffering is a pointer.

You cannot directly change anything in the outer world. Who can? Not us. Not our parents, our siblings, our spouses. God decides what happens outside. But you can change everything in the inner world. And when the inner world changes — when the beliefs shift, when the programming is updated — the outer world responds. Not the other way around.

Life is not responding to the world. The world is responding to you.

This is what God is doing with every experience He sends. He is not punishing. He is not arbitrary. He is pointing — to what is inside, to what needs to change, to the place where the healing is actually waiting. Every illness, every setback, every difficult relationship, every financial struggle is God's hand pointing inward and saying: look here. The playing field is here. The answer is here.

That is the *Cherev HaMithapechet* understood and reversed. The upside-down, turned right-side up.

There are two paths available to a human being. And everyone is on one of them.

The first is the path of pleasure — of defining good and bad by how things feel. If it feels good, it is good. If it feels bad, it is bad. This is the body's paradigm. The child's paradigm. And it manifests differently in every person: for one person, pleasure is a cabin in the woods, quiet, left alone, connected to nature. For another, it is the bright lights of a city, attention, achievement, recognition. The specific content is irrelevant — what is the same is the criterion: good equals feels good, bad equals feels bad.

This is the body ruling. This is the servant sitting on the throne.

The second path is the path of *Da'at* — deep knowing, wisdom, the soul's form of understanding. *Da'at* is not knowledge accumulated from books. It is the knowing that comes from lived experience, from genuine encounter with truth, from the inner transformation that suffering and growth and honest self-examination produce. The soul does not define good by how it feels. It defines good by what it produces — growth, truth, connection to God, the development of the inner self. And it recognizes that painful experiences often carry the greatest *Da'at* — not because suffering is good in itself, but because suffering, when received correctly, delivers something that comfort never can.

The soul's journey is *Da'at*. The body's journey is sensation. They are running in opposite directions inside every person. And the entire work of inner healing — the work this book is about — is the gradual process of shifting the center of gravity from body to soul. From the servant back to the prince. From the body's two eyes back to the soul's singular seeing.

Turning the situation right side up is also understanding the eyes and how to begin to see through the eyes of the soul. The rule is like this: If you are looking out into the world, then you are seeing through the body's eyes. When you look inwardly into your heart, the place of the emotions and the inner thoughts, then you are looking through the eyes of the soul, the observer. And this too is an upside-down illusion. As when we feel negative emotions, we generally look to the outer world for explanations and for solutions. But when we turn it right side up, when things are happening on the outside, then we turn to the inside to observe the emotions and the beliefs that arise so that we may correct the situation that we are being pointed towards to correct.

This shift begins with a single recognition. Not a dramatic event. Not a sudden transformation. A recognition.

The outer world is not the cause. It is the mirror.

You are not the servant. You are the prince.

The soul is the programmer. And when you begin to live from the seat of the soul — when you stop trying to rearrange the world outside and start working on what is running inside — you have made the most fundamental move available to a human being. You have picked up the *Cherev HaMithapechet* and turned it right-side up. You have begun the journey back to the *Eitz HaChayyim*.

That is where everything that follows in this book will take you.

Gradually, little by little. Step by step. The true prince, waking up.

## Chapter Six — The Voice Is the Power

Before we can talk about how to heal, we need to understand how the system works. Not vaguely — precisely. The way a doctor needs to understand the body before treating it: what is the problem, what is causing it, and what is the correct instrument for addressing it. Without that map, even the most well-intentioned effort will miss the mark.

We are here in this world and things are happening around us. The soul has to learn, has to grow, has specific things it needs to accomplish. And the Torah tells us that if we walk in God's ways, we will be happy, we will be healthy, and all the blessings will follow. But in order to walk in those ways, we need to understand the laws that govern the inner world — because the soul operates on specific laws just as the body does. That is why we are going through this. You cannot get out of exile — out of the suffering and constriction — until you understand why you are there and how it works.

There is a question of extreme importance that most people never think to ask — and that everything depends on getting right.

Where does human free choice begin and where does it end?

This matters enormously — because it is a very narrow bridge, and you can fall off either side. If you try to control something that belongs to God's domain, you will exhaust yourself against a wall. And if you abandon what is genuinely yours to do — if you say it is all in God's hands, I have nothing to contribute — you will fail to do what God is waiting for you to do.

The Torah is unequivocal that we have free choice: "*Re'eh natati lifanecha hayom et haChayyim v'et hatov, v'et hamavet v'et hara — u'vacharta baChayyim*" — see, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil — and you shall choose life. (*Deuteronomy 30:15, 19*) Free choice exists. The question is where exactly it operates.

The Talmud teaches: "*Hakol bidei shamayim chutz miyirat shamayim*" — everything is in the hands of heaven except for the fear of heaven. (*Berachot 33b*) And in a separate passage, Rabbi Chanina teaches: a person does not even injure his little finger down here on earth unless it was decreed about him from above. (*Chullin 7b*) The Rambam — Rabbi Moses Maimonides, the great medieval codifier of Jewish law and faith — states in the very first of his thirteen foundational principles of faith: God

creates and steers and guides all of creation. He alone does, did, and will do all actions. And the Talmud adds another striking teaching: "*Badarech she'adam rotzeh leleich bah — molichim oto*" — in the way a person wants to go, they lead him. (*Makkot 10b*) Notice what is strange about that formulation. If a person simply had direct control over where they went, the verse would say: in the way a person wants to go, he goes. Why does it say they lead him? Because even the direction a person chooses is being guided and facilitated from above. And Rabbi Nachman of Breslov takes it to its furthest point: everything a person does — intentionally or unintentionally, on purpose or by accident — is from Him. (*Likutey Moharan*)

Now that sounds, at first, like it leaves nothing for us. And that is precisely the discomfort that arises — because something inside us immediately objects: (The ego really hates this idea and vehemently opposes it with all its might) but what about all my responsibilities? What about my effort and my choices?

We will get there. But first we need to sit with what is being said.

The Torah identifies the belief that our hands — our physical effort, our manipulation of outcomes — control what happens in our lives as the heart of *kefira* — Denial of God's sovereignty.

"*V'amarta bilvavecha kochi v'otzem yadi asah li et hachayil hazeh*" — and you will say in your heart, my strength and the power of my hand has accomplished all this for me. Notice: it says 'you will say in your heart.' The hand is on the heart. The heart is expressing the power of the hand. (*Deuteronomy 8:17*) The Torah does not present this as a minor error. It is the central spiritual danger — the worship of the hand, the ego's claim that it is the source of its own power and outcomes.

This is the foundation of the deception that has been running since the Garden of Eden. And as long as a person believes that the hands are where the power lives, they remain trapped inside the ego's paradigm, working on the wrong level, unable to reach the place where real change actually happens.

Now let us bring in a story from the Torah that illuminates the entire dynamic — and that, when understood correctly, reveals something stunning about the scale of the deception we are dealing with.

The patriarch Isaac was about to give his blessings to his son Esau — blessings of material abundance and earthly power, which he believed Esau would use in service of

the family's sacred mission of bringing God's presence into the world. Along came Yaakov, guided by his mother Rebecca, and received those blessings in Esau's place.

When Esau arrived and the truth was revealed, the Torah tells us that Isaac trembled with an enormous trembling — *vayechedrad Yitzchak charadah gedolah ad me'od*. (*Genesis 27:33*) He was shaken to his absolute core.

Now why? If you think about it carefully, Isaac was one of the greatest human beings who had ever lived. A patriarch. A prophet. A person of towering spiritual stature. And yet — Esau had successfully deceived him. His own son had been playing a role for most of his life, presenting one face to his father while being something else entirely beneath. And Isaac, with all his greatness, had not seen through it.

The Torah is telling us something here that we dare not miss. If you think the force of falsehood and manipulation in this world is something you can casually see through and dismiss — think again. This force had successfully deceived one of the greatest human beings who ever lived, in the most intimate possible relationship, for most of a lifetime. The trembling that fell on Isaac was the trembling of a man who understood, in one shattering moment, who Esau really was and what had almost happened. The magnitude of that deception is the Torah's warning about the magnitude of the force we are dealing with.

And we know this to be the case since Isaac immediately confirmed the blessing — Yaakov shall have it, it shall stand. And Esau began to cry. He said: do you have nothing left for me, Father?

And here is where the prophecy given before they were even born comes back into focus. When Rebecca felt the twins struggling within her during her pregnancy — so intensely that she went to inquire of God what was happening — He told her: "*Shnei goyim b'vitnech, u'shnei le'umim mibimayich yiparedu, u'le'om mile'om ye'ematz, v'rav ya'avod tza'ir*" — two nations are in your womb, and two separate nations will emerge from within you. One nation will be mightier than the other. And the elder will serve the younger. (*Genesis 25:23*) One scepter of power — held by one at a time, passing between them. When one rises, the other falls. When one falls, the other rises. It cannot be otherwise.

And so Isaac told Esau: if Yaakov does what he is supposed to do, he will rule. But if he does not — if he drops the ball — then you will have your opportunity to rise. And you will rule over him. This is the seesaw, the war, that has been running ever since.

To understand what that war is actually about, we need to understand the nature of the two sides. What is Yaakov? What is Esau?

The Torah tells us: "*Titen emet l'Yaakov*" — grant truth to Yaakov. (*Micah 7:20*) Yaakov's entire identity is truth. He is the pursuer of truth, the embodiment of Torah, the one whose power is the power of what is real.

Esau is described in the Torah as one who hunts with his mouth — "*ki tzayid b'fiv*". (*Genesis 25:28*) Not a hunting technique — a character description. Esau is a manipulator. He uses deception, false appearances, the outer performance that conceals what is running beneath. And the Midrash tells us that Esau was born carrying the mark of the original serpent on his body — because he is the serpent's representative in the world, the continuation of that original deception that began in the Garden.

So essentially what Isaac established here — what is unfolding in this entire drama — is a precise law: as long as Yaakov does what he is supposed to do, meaning he pursues truth and becomes expert in recognizing and dealing in truth, he will see through Esau's manipulation and deception no matter how powerful it may be. You cannot deceive someone who sees clearly. And thus Esau's strongest weapon loses its power. But if Yaakov does not do what he is supposed to do — if he abandons his role as a pursuer of truth — then Esau rises, because his power of deception and manipulation becomes effective the moment the eye of truth is no longer fully open.

This is why the war between Yaakov and Esau is the war between truth and falsehood. And what stands at the very heart of Esau's deception — the core of the lie that, if believed, hands him victory? It is right there in what Isaac said when Yaakov entered the room.

"*Hakol kol Yaakov, vehayadayim yedei Esav*" — the voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esau. (*Genesis 27:22*)

This was not merely a description of a disguise. It was a prophecy — the precise identification of the two forces contending within creation and within every human being. The hands belong to Esau. The voice belongs to Yaakov.

The hands — the illusion that we are the body, and that physical effort, manipulation, and control are the source of outcomes. That is Esau's domain. That is the heart of the deception. And the voice — the spoken word, the mouth, the inner world of belief expressed outward — that is Yaakov's domain. That is where truth lives and where genuine power operates.

As long as a person believes in the hands — as long as *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — rules the inner world — Esau has the scepter. The moment that illusion is released and the voice is reclaimed as the true instrument of power, the scepter passes back to Yaakov.

To understand how committed this force is to maintaining their power through deception, look at what Amalek (Esau's grandson) — the most direct embodiment of Esau's mission in history — was willing to do.

When the People of Israel came out of Egypt and their power was rising, the nations of the world were already terrified. As the Song of the Sea declares: "*Az nivhalu alufei Edom, eilei Moav yochazeimo ra'ad, namogu kol yoshvei Chenaan. Tikol aleihem eimatah vafachad bigdol zero'acha yidemu*" — then the chieftains of Edom were panicked, the powerful men of Moav — trembling seized them, all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Terror and dread fell upon them; by the greatness of Your arm they are still as stone. (*Exodus 15:15-16*) The sea had split. Miracles had been performed. Everyone was trembling. And yet Amalek threw themselves into battle anyway — knowing they would be crushed — simply to slow the momentum. Like someone throwing themselves in front of a moving train at full speed just to slow it down slightly. Now that is dedication. If you thought they were playing games — think again. They understood exactly what was at stake. And they were willing to give their lives for it. Let that sink in.

And look at the condition for defeating them. Moshe raised his hands. As long as his hands were raised toward heaven, Israel prevailed. When his hands lowered, Amalek prevailed. (*Exodus 17:11*) And the Torah tells us: his hands were *emunah* — lived faith, the soul's unwavering trust in God. (*Exodus 17:12*)

What does raising hands have to do with winning a war? Everything. Because raising your hands upward — stretching them toward heaven — is the physical gesture of surrender. Not surrender to the enemy. Surrender of the ego's claim to power. It says: not my hand. Yours. I am the instrument. You are the source. The moment that posture is genuinely embodied, Amalek loses his foothold. Because his entire power is the belief in the hand. Remove that belief, and there is nothing left for him to stand on.

And now the verse that seals the whole picture:

"*Ki yad al kes Yah — milchamah l'Hashem b'Amalek midor dor*" — a hand is on the throne of God, and the war with Amalek continues from generation to generation. (*Exodus 17:16*)

Rashi notes that two words in this verse are written incompletely. The word for throne is written *kes* — missing the aleph that would complete it to *kisei*. And God's name is written only *Yah* — just two letters of the full four-letter name. Both the Name and the Throne are incomplete. And the reason given: a hand is on the throne. As long as the ego's hand is sitting where it does not belong, both are incomplete.

What is this throne? It is the heart. The Torah says: "*V'asu li mikdash v'shachanti b'tocham*" — make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within them. (*Exodus 25:8*) Not within the building — within each person. God's real dwelling place in this world is the human heart. *Bil'vavi Mishkan evneh* — in my heart I will build Him a dwelling place.

And consider this: the entire Torah begins with the letter Bet — the first letter of Bereishit — and ends with the letter Lamed — the last letter of Yisrael. Bet-Lamed spells *lev* — heart. The entire Torah is encapsulated within the heart. That has always been the playing field. That has always been where everything actually happens.

As long as the ego's hand — *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — sits on the throne of the heart, God's name is incomplete within us and the war continues. The moment the hand comes off the throne — the moment the illusion is released and the heart opens — the name becomes complete. The throne is restored.

Notice that the verse itself reveals exactly where that hand sits. It does not say 'you will do with your hand.' It says *v'amarta bilvavecha* — you will say in your heart: "The strength and might of my hand has done all this for me." The belief lives in the heart. The hand is on the throne before a single action is ever taken.

And now we can understand what our genuine power is and where it actually lives.

*"Hakol kol Yaakov"* — the voice is the voice of Yaakov.

The voice. The mouth. The spoken word. This is the domain of the servants of God — the instrument through which the inner world is reprogrammed, through which beliefs are changed, through which the path from exile to redemption is walked.

The Torah makes this explicit:

*"Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od — b'ficha u'vilvavcha la'asoto"* — for this matter is very close to you — in your mouth and in your heart to do it. (*Deuteronomy 30:14*)

Moshe is describing what it takes to follow God's ways — to live aligned with truth. And he says: it is not far. It is not in heaven where you cannot reach it. It is not across

the ocean where it is impossibly difficult. It is very close. In your mouth and in your heart. Not in your hands. Not in physical effort and willpower. In your mouth — the spoken word — and in your heart — the inner world of belief.

That is where the work lives. That is where the power lives. That is where change actually happens.

When the programming of the heart is correct — when the beliefs are aligned with truth — the body follows naturally. The right action flows from the right inner state. *Sof maaseh b'machshava techila* — the end action begins in thought. What you genuinely believe is what manifests in the world you experience.

So how does the reprogramming actually work?

The Torah tells us: "*V'hayah hadevarim ha'eileh al levavecha — v'dibarta bam*" — let these words be upon your heart and speak of them. (*Deuteronomy 6:6-7*) When you sit at home, when you walk on the way, when you lie down, when you rise. Constantly. Repeatedly.

*V'limadtem otam et bneichem ledaber bam* — and you shall teach them to your children, to speak of them. (*Deuteronomy 11:19*)

And then: "*V'yadaata hayom vahashevota el levavecha*" — and you shall know today and return it to your heart. (*Deuteronomy 4:39*) First you know — you understand the concept intellectually. Then you return it — you speak it, repeat it, rehearse it — until it migrates from the head into the heart and becomes lived belief rather than intellectual knowledge.

And the Torah gives us even more: "*He'emanti ki adaber*" — I believed because I spoke. (*Psalms 116:10*) Not I spoke because I believed — I believed because I spoke. The speaking creates the believing. The word planted in the mouth finds its way into the heart. And: "*Odiya emunascha b'fi*" — I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth. (*Psalms 89:2*) The mouth is the instrument of faith. And the prophet Hosea gives us the practical instruction for anyone who wants to return to God: "*Kechu imachem devarim v'shuvu el Hashem*" — take with you words and return to God. (*Hosea 14:3*) Not offerings. Not physical gestures. Words. Take words and return.

This is how the programmer operates. Not by force of will. By speaking truth into the heart, repeatedly, patiently — like a gardener planting seeds. You do not force a seed to grow. You plant it in good soil, you water it, you return to it again and again. And in

time it grows — because that is the nature of a seed placed in good soil. That is how we plant truth into the heart until the heart grows it into the world. Until faith — the soul's faculty of acceptance — is redirected from the lies it has been investing in toward what is actually true.

*"Emet me'ereetz titzmach"* — truth will sprout from the earth. (*Psalms 85:12*) The language is the language of planting and growth. You plant truth through the voice, through speaking and repeating and returning — and it sprouts. It grows. It becomes the reality you live in.

*"Mavet v'chayyim b'yad lashon"* — death and life are in the hand of the tongue. (*Proverbs 18:21*) Not the hand of the arm. The hand of the tongue. The speaking is the power.

And so when Moshe said earlier, *"Re'eh natati lifanecha hayom et haChayyim v'et hatov, v'et hamavet v'et hara — u'vacharta baChayyim"* — I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil — choose life — now we understand how that choice works. It is in the hand of the tongue. The voice is the instrument of choosing life. What you speak, repeat, and plant into the heart is how you choose.

There is one more thing that needs to be said — and it dissolves a confusion that many people carry.

If everything that happens is from God — if even our own acts of service and growth are ultimately His enabling — what determines whether those acts are life-giving or deadening?

The Talmud teaches: *"Zacha — na'aseit lo sam chayyim. Lo zacha — na'aseit lo sam mavet"* — if one merited, it became for him a potion of life. If one did not merit, it became for him a potion of death. (*Yoma 72b*) And what does *zacha* — meriting — mean?

Could it really mean something as arbitrary as divine approval? That if God happens to favor me, my Torah and my good deeds become a potion of life — and if not, a potion of death? Could it truly be a matter of being lucky enough to find favor in His eyes? That is not a system of cosmic law. That is randomness dressed in religious clothing. But rather...

It means recognizing that the ability to do the act was given to you. God, I am grateful that You gave me the opportunity to do this. The act came through me but from Him.

Not meriting means claiming the credit for the ego. I did this. My effort. My discipline. My achievement. The moment that credit is taken by the hand rather than returned to its source, the act that could have been life-giving becomes the opposite — because the fundamental lie of *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — has been reinscribed at the very moment you were meant to be moving away from it.

Even a Torah scholar — *ish*, a person of developed stature — can walk a path that appears straight and that leads to death. (*Proverbs 14:12, as understood by the Vilna Gaon*) Because the path itself is not the variable. The inner orientation is the variable. Who is getting the credit? The voice or the hand?

So here is where we stand.

The outer world cannot be changed directly — God governs that domain. The hands are not the source of power — that is Esau's illusion, the fundamental deception, the turning sword in its most basic form.

What is genuinely, fully, entirely within our domain is the inner world. Our attention — where we direct our gaze, what we choose to see and focus on. Our mouth — the words we speak. And our beliefs — what we cultivate through directing our attention and through speaking.

You cannot change a computer monitor by drawing over it. What you see on the screen is only a reflection of the programming running inside. We have to become the programmers. We have to learn to operate at the level where thought determines action and belief determines experience. We have to use the voice — the voice of Yaakov — to reprogram our beliefs and to plant truth into the heart until the heart grows it into the world.

*Ki karov eilecha hadavar me'od.* It is very close to you.

Not in the heavens. Not across the ocean. In your mouth and in your heart. Available right now, with the very faculties you already possess.

And exile — *Mitzrayim*, from the word *metzarim*, constriction — is the narrow, squeezed place. While the Land of Israel — "*eretz tovah ur'chavah*" — a good and broad land (*Exodus 3:8*) — the destination of the journey — represents the expanded

consciousness of faith, the wide open inner landscape of a soul that has learned to live from the voice rather than the hand. Rabbi Nachman teaches that faith and the Land of Israel share the same spiritual essence. (*Likutey Moharan*)

The journey between exile and the Land of Israel is walked one word at a time.

The voice is the power. The heart is the garden. The truth is the seed.

## Chapter Seven — A Simple Technique

I would like to introduce you to an idea. An ancient idea — one that has been available yet hidden within the pages of the Torah for thousands of years. And it is not unique to the Torah alone. Many ancient cultures have spoken of it, and it is slowly beginning to make a comeback within the healing world today.

It is an idea that is extremely powerful — and yet beautiful in its simplicity. So simple, in fact, that it is available to everyone, immediately, with minimal effort. You do not need special training, special equipment, or special circumstances. You can begin using it the moment you finish this chapter. And within a very short period of time, you will notice something shift.

Embedded within it, also, is nothing less than the secret of redemption itself.

We ended Chapter Three with a verse that deserves a second look.

"*V'lo sham'u el Moshe mikotzer ruach umei'avodah kashah*" — they could not hear Moshe because of the constriction of spirit and the crushing labor. (*Exodus 6:9*)

*Kotzer ruach*. In Hebrew, *ruach* means both spirit and wind/breath. And *kotzer* means shortness — constriction, cutting short. So this phrase carries a double meaning that is invisible in translation: constriction of spirit, yes — but also shortness of breath. The two are not separate phenomena wearing the same name by coincidence. They are the same phenomenon experienced at two levels simultaneously. When the spirit is constricted, the breath becomes short and shallow. And when the breath is short, the spirit constricts further.

And notice something remarkable about how the verse is constructed. The Torah lists *kotzer ruach* — constriction of spirit, shortness of breath — before the hard labor. Not after. Before. The shortness of breath is named first, as the deeper and more primary bondage. The slave labor was crushing. But it was the short breath — the closed inner channel — that truly prevented them from hearing.

This is the death spiral described in Chapter Three, now seen from a new angle. The chronic fear. The fight-or-flight. The walls closing in. The inability to hear the message of liberation even when it is being delivered directly. All of it expressed in two Hebrew words: *kotzer ruach*. Short breath. Constricted spirit. One condition, two faces.

And the inverse is equally precise. But to feel the full weight of what the Hebrew is revealing, we need to make a stop at one of the most extraordinary moments in the entire Torah.

After the sin of the Golden Calf — after the near-destruction of the entire people and the shattering of the first tablets — Moshe makes an extraordinary request. He says to God: "*Har'eini na et kevodecha*" — show me Your glory. (*Exodus 33:18*) Not just Your presence. Not just Your power. Your glory. The deepest possible revelation of who You are.

And God answers him. He tells Moshe: I will pass My goodness before you. I will proclaim My name. And He reveals to him the thirteen divine attributes — the deepest description of how God governs the world, the qualities through which mercy flows into creation.

And when Moshe hears them — when he truly encounters what God has revealed — the Torah tells us he fell on his face. (*Exodus 34:8*)

The Talmud asks: why? Of all the thirteen attributes — of all the extraordinary qualities of the Divine that were revealed in that moment — what was it specifically that brought this great prophet to the ground in awe? (*Sanhedrin 111a*)

The answer: *erech apayim*. Literally — the lengthening of the nostrils. Extended breath. The divine patience that holds the channel open even when judgment would close it, that keeps mercy flowing even where it seems undeserved, that refuses to cut short what has not yet fully unfolded.

Think about that for a moment. Of all thirteen attributes — *Nosei avon vafesha v'chata* — He forgives sin and rebellion and transgression. *Rav chesed* — abundant in loving-kindness. *V'nakei* — and He cleanses. All of these magnificent qualities. And Moshe falls on his face for the lengthened nostrils.

Because Moshe understood something that most people miss entirely. *Erech apayim* — the lengthened breath — is not simply one attribute among many. It is the gateway through which all the others flow. Without the open channel, nothing else can reach you.

*Kotzer ruach* closes. *Erech apayim* opens.

And now the inverse of exile comes into full view. Exile — *Galut* — is *kotzer ruach*: short breath, contracted consciousness. Redemption — *Geulah* — is *erech apayim*:

lengthened breath, expanded consciousness. The journey from exile to redemption is, quite literally, a journey from shallow to deep breathing.

And the bridge between them — the most immediate, most physical, most available instrument for moving from one to the other — is the breath itself.

But how deep does this go? The Torah's connection between breath and redemption runs deeper than even this extraordinary encounter.

The prophet Jeremiah writes: "*Ruach Apayinu Moshiach Hashem*" — the breath of our nostrils is the Moshiach of God. (*Lamentations 4:20*) The breath of the nostrils — the very thing Moshe fell on his face for — is linked directly to Moshiach, to the great redemption.

And Isaiah, describing Moshiach, says: "*V'haricho b'yirat Hashem*" — and he will breathe with *Yirat Hashem*, with the awe and trust of God. (*Isaiah 11:3*) The defining characteristic of Moshiach is not his power, not his military might — it is that he breathes with the awe and trust of God. The lengthened, open, trusting breath.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, in *Likutey Moharan* (Volume I, Torah 2), cites a striking passage from *Sifra DeTzniuta* — the Book of Concealment — Chapter 2, embedded within the Zohar on Parashat Terumah (177a): "*Mi'nukva d'pardashka mashach rucha d'chayei l'meshicha*" — from the nostrils of the supernal source, the breath of life is drawn to Moshiach. The breath — the *rucha*, the spirit — of Moshiach originates in and flows through the supernal nostrils. The redemption itself is born through the breath.

The entire spectrum — from exile to redemption, from *Galut* to *Geulah* — exists within the range of the breath. *Kotzer ruach* is exile. *Erech apayim* is redemption. And the journey between them begins the moment you choose to consciously lengthen your breath.

And if you want to trace this thread all the way back to the very beginning — it is there from the first verse of creation. The Torah tells us: "*V'ruach Elohim merachefet al pnei hamayim*" — and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (*Genesis 1:2*) The Midrash reads this verse as the very first hint of Moshiach in the entire Torah: the spirit of God hovering over the primordial waters is the spirit of Moshiach. (*Bereishit Rabbah 2:4*) The first appearance of *ruach* — spirit, breath — in the Torah points forward to the redemption. Breath and Moshiach are tied together from the very first lines of creation.

Now here is where the Torah reveals something that has been hiding in plain sight.

The Hebrew word for soul is *Neshamah*. The Hebrew word for breath is *Neshimah*. They share the same root — nun, shin, mem — because they are, in the Torah's understanding, the same thing seen from two different angles. The breath is not merely a biological function. It is the ongoing, moment-by-moment expression of the soul's presence in the body.

This connection is established at the very creation of the human being. The Torah tells us: "*Vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim*" — and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life. (*Genesis 2:7*) The soul entered through the nose. The breath and the soul arrived together. And they have been inseparable ever since. As we saw with the word *ruach* — which carries both meanings in a single word: spirit and wind/breath. The same word for the wind blowing across the sea and the spirit of God hovering over the waters. The physical and the spiritual, bound together in one breath.

This is why the breath is unlike almost any other bodily function. Think about it for a moment. Your heartbeat happens without you. Your digestion happens without you. Your immune system operates entirely beneath your awareness. But the breath is different. It happens automatically when you are not paying attention — and it comes under conscious control the moment you choose to direct it. It is one of the very few functions that spans both worlds: the conscious and the unconscious, the voluntary and the involuntary. It is the bridge between the part of you that you control and the part of you that runs beneath awareness.

And because it bridges those two worlds, it is the most powerful lever available for changing your inner state — quickly, directly, and without requiring anything other than your own attention.

When a person is in stress, fear, anxiety, or panic, the body produces a specific breathing pattern — shallow, rapid, high in the chest. The short breath is not just a symptom of the stressed state. It is also one of its primary triggers. The shallow breath signals the nervous system: danger is present, stay on alert. And the nervous system responds by deepening the stress response.

Here is what researchers discovered: the reverse is also true. When a person consciously deepens and lengthens the breath in the middle of a moment of fear or anxiety — the amygdala, the brain's alarm center and the biological trigger of fight-or-flight, begins to shut down. It reads the deepened breath as a signal that the danger has

passed. The body believes the siege is over. The executive brain — the thinking, creative, feeling part — begins to come back online. The healing mechanisms reactivate.

The body listens to the breath. And through the breath, you can speak directly to the parts of yourself that no thought or decision can reach.

Now there is a question that naturally arises. With all the breathing techniques available today — four seconds in, four seconds out, hold for three, etc., various combinations and methods — what specifically are we being asked to do?

I want to offer something simpler and more ancient than any technique.

The Talmud teaches: "*Mah hu she'haNeshamah neheneit mimenu v'haguf eino neheneh? Zeh reiach*" — what is it that the soul benefits from and the body does not? Fragrance. (*Berachot 43b*)

Think about what this means. Of all the pleasures available to a human being — food, music, beauty, touch — the rabbis identified smell as the one that bypasses the body entirely and goes straight to the soul. Every other sense feeds the body in some way. Smell feeds only the soul.

And this is not a coincidence of anatomy. It is encoded in the creation of the human being. The soul entered through the nose. The sense that lives in the nose — smell — is the sense that reaches the soul most directly.

There is something even more striking. Of the five senses, only smell was left untouched by what happened in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, four of their five senses were involved. They heard the serpent's words. They saw that the fruit was beautiful. They touched it when they took it. They tasted it when they ate. But they never smelled it. Smell alone remained pristine — uncorrupted, untouched — the one direct line still open between the human soul and its source.

This is why the entire sacrificial system in the Book of Leviticus — at almost every offering, without exception — is described with the same phrase: *reiach nichoach* — a pleasant aroma for God. The medium through which the human being connects to the Divine is fragrance. The nose is the portal.

And there is one more extraordinary connection. The Talmud teaches, on the verse in Isaiah describing Moshiach — "*v'haricho b'yirat Hashem*" — that Moshiach will judge by his sense of smell: *morach v'dayyin* — he smells and judges. (*Sanhedrin 93b*)

His sense of smell will be so developed that he perceives the inner truth of a person directly, bypassing what the eyes see and what the ears hear. The nose — the organ of breath — stands at the very center of the redemption. And Bar Kochba was disqualified as a false Moshiach specifically because he could not judge by smell. The nose was the test. Notice too: the Hebrew word for smell, *Reach*, shares the same root as *Ruach* — spirit, wind, breath, smell. They are all woven together in the same root. The nose is not incidental to the redemption. It is central to it.

So here is the teaching — simple, ancient, and available to you right now.

You are welcome to engage in any of the many breathing techniques available — counting, box breathing, and all the rest. They are all valuable. However, try this as well.

Breathe at the pace of smell.

When you bring something fragrant close and breathe it in fully — really take it in — your body automatically slows down. You cannot rush a smell. You cannot grab it the way you grab food. You have to open to it, draw it in slowly, let it reach you. That natural pace — the pace your body instinctively adopts when it wants to truly receive a fragrance — is the pace of a deep, healing breath. It is *erech apayim* in its most literal and immediate form. The lengthened nostril. The open channel.

Surround yourself with something that smells genuinely good. Not synthetic — something natural, something that actually invites you to breathe. Incense if that is your inclination. Fresh flowers. The smell of rain, or earth, or cedar, or herbs. Whatever calls to you. Make it pleasant enough that you actually want to breathe it in. And then breathe. Slowly. At the pace of smell.

But the practice of smelling the world around you is valuable regardless of whether what you are smelling is pleasant. Get into the habit of using this sense. Most of us walk through our days barely smelling anything — we have essentially switched off one of the most soulful faculties we possess. Smell your food before you eat it. Notice the air when you walk outside. Be present to the world through your nose. Wake up a faculty that has been sleeping. There is a good reason for the old saying that you need to slow down and smell the flowers along the way. In the hustle and bustle of life, in the chaos, we forget. We need to bring smell back.

The pleasant fragrance serves a specific purpose: it motivates you to breathe deeply. When something smells genuinely good, you want more of it. You naturally draw the breath in longer and slower to receive it fully. So when you want to practice conscious

deep breathing — spray something you love on your hand, light incense, put something fragrant nearby — and let the desire to smell it do the work of the breath for you. You will breathe better than any counting technique could produce, because you will want to.

Now — Shabbat.

Every week, for one day, the Torah commands a complete stop. No work. No building. No creating. Rest. And *Shemittah* — every seven years, let the field rest entirely. Do not sow. Do not harvest. Trust that what grows on its own will be enough.

At first glance this seems like an odd thing to celebrate or command. God created the entire world in six days — the light, the heavens, the earth, the sea, every living creature. Should we not be celebrating the days of creation? But the Torah tells us: we celebrate the seventh day. The day of rest. The day He did nothing.

Why? Because the rest is the point. The stopping is the destination. The breath after the labor is what everything was building toward. Shabbat is not the interruption of life — it is its highest expression. The state of *menuchah* — of true rest, of open breath, of *erech apayim* — is the state of redemption itself.

And this is not only built into the week. It was built into the liberation from Egypt as well. The very first thing Moshe did when he arrived was to convince Pharaoh to institute a day of rest — to give the people Shabbat. A breather. A chance to catch their breath. And only then — only once the breath began to return — could they begin to think about redemption. Only once the *kotzer ruach* began to lift could Moshe's words begin to reach them.

The breath is the prerequisite for hearing the message of liberation. It was true in Egypt. It is true now.

There is one more thing that needs to be said — and I want to say it plainly because I believe it to be true.

I would argue that one of the primary functions of the inner voice — the constant mental chatter that fills our waking hours — is specifically to keep our attention away from the breath. To keep us unconscious. To keep us identified with the noise rather than with the quiet beneath it. Because the moment a person returns their attention to the breath — truly, consciously, fully — the chatter loses its grip. You cannot be

completely focused on the sensation of a deep, slow breath and simultaneously be pulled into the drama of the inner voice. It is one or the other. And the inner voice knows this.

What the inner voice is really telling you, underneath all its noise, is that you need it. That this chatter is what keeps you safe. That you must stay tuned in and alert, always listening, or something will catch you off guard. When you take a deep breath and release — when you consciously slow down and let go — you are saying: no. God has this. I do not need to be in a state of constant alarm. The voice loses its grip the moment you genuinely believe that.

Every time you notice your breath has become shallow and you consciously choose to deepen it — every time you pull your attention back from the noise and return it to the breath — you are doing something far more significant than a relaxation exercise.

You are performing an act of faith. Of genuine trust.

Because what you are saying — with your body, in the most immediate and physical way possible — is: I am safe. He is in control. The world is not the dangerous, threatening place the inner voice insists it is. I do not need to hold on to this fear. I do not need to stay on guard. I can let go, because I am held.

The deepened breath is the body's way of saying: I trust You.

It is the same act as Shabbat — putting down the work, stopping the effort, and trusting that He will take care of what you cannot. It is the same act as *Shemittah* — releasing the field, releasing the outcome, releasing the grip of control. It is trust — expressed not in words or theology but in the most primal, physical, immediate act available to a human being.

*Vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim.* And He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life.

Every conscious breath is a remembering of that moment. Every slow, deep, fragrant breath is a small act of return — from *kotzer ruach* back toward *erech apayim*, from the world is going to get me to He's got me, from exile back toward redemption, from the closed channel back toward the open one.

You can begin right now.

## Chapter Eight — Learning to See

We have established where the power actually lives — in the voice, in the mouth, in the heart. We have established that the hands are not our domain and that giving them back to heaven is the beginning of freedom. But this raises an immediate question: what exactly does it look like to give the hands back? What is the inner state we are moving toward? What is on the other end of the spectrum from *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand has done this?

The Torah gives it a name. And the name is *Yirat Hashem* — the fear of God.

Now the moment most people hear the words fear of God they think of something they are not sure they want. A vague sense of religiosity, perhaps. A feeling of being watched and judged. Something that belongs to people of towering piety — not to someone in the middle of illness and pain and daily struggle.

But look at the Hebrew more carefully.

The word *Yira* — fear — shares its root with *Re'iya* — sight, seeing. In the same way that *Neshimah* and *Neshamah* share a root and are therefore linked in meaning, so too *Yira* and *Re'iya* are linked. The Torah is combining the two concepts deliberately. *Yirat Hashem* is not primarily an emotion. It is a seeing. A specific way of perceiving reality. A particular kind of vision that, once opened, transforms everything it touches.

And what does it see?

Let us understand the spectrum.

On one end: *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — the belief that human hands are the source of power and outcomes. The more deeply a person inhabits this end of the spectrum, the more they see human beings — themselves and others — as the causes of what happens in their lives. He can hurt me. She can hold back what I need. My own effort is what determines whether things work out. And the natural consequence of seeing human beings as causes is fearing human beings. Why are we afraid of someone? Because we believe they have power over us — power to harm us, to withhold from us, to determine our fate. Every fear of a person, every anxiety about a circumstance, every dread of an outcome — these all flow from the same root: seeing human beings as independent sources of power.

And the further down that path you go, the more God gets pushed to the margins. He becomes — in this worldview — someone who blows leaves around while human beings run the show. A distant presence, vaguely aware, but not really the one determining what happens.

In other words, we are literally pushing God out of our lives — out of our immediate world, and in a sense, out of the world entirely. The less we see His hand, the less room we leave for His presence.

On the other end of the spectrum: *Yirat Hashem* — the seeing of God as the cause of all causes. The recognition that everything happening around you is His hand operating through it. That no person, no circumstance, no illness, no setback has independent power. That what appears to be human action is always and only a vehicle through which He is working. When that seeing opens — when you genuinely perceive God as the only real cause in your life — fear of everything else automatically dissolves. You cannot fear a secondary cause when you are seeing the primary cause clearly. People become not irrelevant as people, but irrelevant as independent sources of power. And God becomes not a distant presence but the immediate, active, present reality behind every single thing you experience.

Consider something we established in an earlier chapter — a teaching from the Talmud that has been quietly anchoring this entire journey. “*Hakol bidei shamayim chutz miyirat shamayim*” — everything is in the hands of heaven, except for the fear of heaven. (*Berachot 33b*) We first encountered this as the definition of the narrow bridge of free choice. But stand with it now, in the light of everything we have built since.

Everything is in the hands of heaven — except for the fear of heaven. In other words: everything is in God’s control, except for the ability to see that everything is in God’s control. That seeing — *Yirat Shamayim*, the perception that His hand is behind everything — is precisely what has been left to us. It is our free choice. Not the choice of what happens to us. The choice of how much we see His hand in what happens to us.

Which means the entire domain of human free choice is the domain of perception. We do not choose our circumstances. We choose what we see in our circumstances. We do not control outcomes. We choose whether we recognize the Author behind the outcomes. That is the narrow bridge. That is our lane. And that is why *Yirat Hashem* is not simply a virtue among virtues — it is the very faculty of free choice itself, the one place where God stepped back and said: this part is yours.

This shift — from one end of the spectrum to the other — is the work. And it is not achieved by effort in the conventional sense. It is achieved by seeing differently. By reprogramming the lens through which we perceive reality. By speaking truth into the heart, over and over, until *Yirat Hashem* becomes the default orientation of the inner world.

Now let us bring a proof — because this is not an abstract idea. The Torah demonstrates it in one of the most dramatic moments in all of Jewish history.

The Jewish people are standing at the bank of the Sea of Reeds. They are completely trapped — the Egyptian army behind them, the sea in front of them, mountains on either side. God splits the sea. They walk across on dry land. They turn around. And lo and behold — the Egyptians are dead on the bank.

And the Torah tells us something extraordinary about what happened next. Here is the verse in full:

*"Vayar Yisrael et Mitzrayim met al sfat hayam, vayar Yisrael et hayad hagedolah asher asah Hashem b'Mitzrayim, vayiru ha'am et Hashem, vaya'aminu b'Hashem u'v'Moshe avdo"* — and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the bank of the sea, and Israel saw the great hand that God had done in Egypt, and the people feared God, and they believed in God and in Moshe His servant. (*Exodus 14:30-31*)

Notice that the Torah uses the word *vayar* — they saw — twice. First: they saw the Egyptians dead on the bank. That is the physical seeing — the eyes of the body registering what was in front of them. But then immediately: they saw the great hand that God had done in Egypt. Not at the sea — in Egypt. They are standing at the bank of the sea, looking at the drowned Egyptians, and suddenly they see what God did back in Egypt.

Think about that. They lived through the ten plagues. They saw blood and frogs and darkness and the death of the firstborn. The Egyptian magicians themselves said: *"Etzba Elohim hi"* — this is the finger of God. (*Exodus 8:15*) And yet somehow, for many of them, it was only in this moment — standing at the sea — that they truly saw with their inner eyes that everything they had experienced in Egypt was God's hand. Not coincidence. Not nature. Not human action. His hand, moving through every event.

And look at what the verse tells us follows in precise sequence: they saw the great hand — and then they feared God — and then they believed. The seeing came first. The

*Yirat Hashem* — the fear, the awe, the alignment — followed the seeing. And the *Emunah* deepened with it.

This is the sequence: see His hand in what is happening — *Yirat Hashem* opens — *Emunah* deepens. The fear of God is not manufactured by willpower. It is the natural result of a shift in perception. When you begin to genuinely see God operating in the events of your life, the awe arrives on its own. It cannot be forced. But it can be cultivated — by persistently training the inner eye to see what is actually there.

Now here is a *mashal* — a parable — that makes this completely vivid.

Think about the difference between a movie and a cartoon.

In a movie, you have actors walking through real locations — a park, a street, a room. And in the background of the shot, there might be a tree. A bird might fly through the frame. Another person might happen to walk past. These background elements arrived by accident — the director was filming the actor, and the tree and the bird and the passerby simply happened to be there. They made it into the movie. They were not placed there intentionally.

A cartoon works entirely differently. An artist sits down and draws every single element — not just the main character but every leaf on every tree, every line on every leaf, every detail in the background. Nothing arrived by accident. Everything is intentional. Everything was placed there deliberately by the artist with a specific purpose.

Living with this concept of divine providence (*Hashgacha Pratis* — Divine supervision over the fine details), as it was taught by the sages, is the difference between living in a movie and living in a cartoon. God is not the director of a movie, trying to capture the main action while random background events drift in and out of frame. He is the artist of a cartoon — every detail of your life, every person who crosses your path, every circumstance that arrives, every experience that finds you — intentionally placed. Deliberately designed. Sent with a purpose.

Our job is to make the shift — from movie-consciousness to cartoon-consciousness. From seeing a world of random events happening around us to seeing a world of intentional communications addressed to us.

And why does this matter so profoundly for healing? Because the moment you genuinely understand that every experience coming through your life is coming from

God — that there is a message embedded in your suffering, a communication in your illness, a letter from the Creator in your pain — A Calling! — everything changes. You are no longer a passive victim of random misfortune. You are the recipient of a message from the One who knows you completely and is trying to bring you somewhere. The question shifts from “why is this happening to me?” to “what are You saying to me?”

That single shift in question is the beginning of the exit from exile.

There is a verse in the daily prayers that contains a teaching most people pass over without noticing:

*"Ashrei adam she'yishma l'mitzvotcha, v'Toratcha u'devarecha yasim al libo"* — praiseworthy is the person who listens to Your commandments, and places Your Torah and Your words upon his heart.

Look at the end of that verse carefully. *V'Toratcha u'devarecha* — Your Torah and Your words. Why both? Is the Torah not His words? What is being added by saying *devarecha* — Your words — separately from *Toratcha* — Your Torah?

The answer is this: Torah is the written teaching — the eternal instruction given at Sinai. But *devarim* — words — refers to His ongoing, present-tense communication through the events of your life. Every experience is a word from God. Every difficulty is a sentence in a letter addressed to you personally. *Toratcha u'devarecha* — the written Torah and the living word, the Sinai teaching and the daily communication of your actual life — placed on the heart together.

And then the Torah deepens this further: *"V'haya im shamo'a tishm'u"* — and it will be, if you listen, you will listen. (*Deuteronomy 11:13*) The double language — *shamo'a tishma* — listen, you will listen — is not redundancy. It is a teaching about two levels of hearing. Listen to the Torah. And listen to what He is saying to you through the texture of your life. When both channels are open — when a person is genuinely listening on both frequencies — all the blessings that follow in that passage begin to flow.

Until a person understands *Yirat Hashem* — until they genuinely see God operating in the world around them — there is nothing to unpack. The events of life are just events. Painful things are just painful. Difficult people are just difficult. But once the cartoon-vision opens — once you begin to see every detail as intentionally placed — suddenly there is a message everywhere. A conversation happening between you and God, carried on through the medium of your life itself.

This is what God is always trying to bring you toward. And this is the foundation of everything that comes next.

Now here is what changes about prayer when this vision opens.

Most of us pray for external things. Give me health. Give me money. Fix this situation. Change that person. And we wonder why our prayers sometimes feel unanswered — hit or miss, uncertain, disconnected.

Here is why. If God is speaking to you through your suffering — if the illness or the difficulty is a message He is trying to deliver — then changing the outer situation before you have received the message would mean you never get the message. You would be lost, the very thing He was trying to give you would be taken from you, and you would repeat the same pattern again elsewhere. If He is trying to reach you, ignoring the message does not make it stop. It makes it louder.

So what does real prayer look like when you see from the cartoon perspective? It sounds like this: God, I know You are communicating with me through this. I know there is something here You are trying to show me. I do not yet understand what it is. Please give me the *Da'at* — the deep understanding — to receive Your message. What are You trying to tell me?

That prayer is answered. Always. Not necessarily in five minutes — sometimes it takes months or years for the vessel to be built that can hold the answer. Because you cannot receive what you do not yet have a vessel to contain. But God immediately sets about building that vessel — sending the right book at the right moment, the right teacher, the right experience, whatever is needed to gradually build the capacity to understand the answer being given. *Emet me'ereetz titzmach* — the truth will sprout forth from the earth. (*Psalms 85:12*) It is a growing process. You plant the seed — the sincere question — and God begins to grow the answer. Sometimes the fruit comes quickly. Sometimes you need to wait while the tree is being built.

As God says: "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha hamaalcha mei'ereetz Mitzrayim — harchev picha va'amaleyhu*" — I am God your God who brings you up out of the land of Egypt — open your mouth wide and I will fill it. (*Psalms 81:11*) What this is telling us is that prayers connected to getting out of our personal Egypt — our constriction, our suffering, our exile — are always answered. God is inviting us to engage in this kind of prayer frequently and regularly. Open your mouth. He will fill it.

That type of prayer is answered, always. Because it is the truth. It is asking for what the soul actually needs.

*"Karov Hashem l'chol kor'av, l'chol asher yikra'uhu v'emet"* — God is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. (*Psalms 145:18*) Truth is what gives prayer its power. Calling in truth means calling from the inner world rather than from the outer one. From the soul rather than from the hand.

Now I would like to bring your attention back to the verse “this matter is very close to you in your mouth and in your heart.” Moshe is telling us that not only is it not impossible, it is not even difficult. Not only is it not difficult but it is very very close to you — in your mouth and in your heart. But this goes even further than that. It says in Proverbs that “his ways are ways of pleasantness.” If they are pleasantness, his ways, if it’s not pleasant then you need to consider that there may be something here you are missing or that needs correction. So how does all this make a pleasant path? Because what we are looking at here, with all of this, is the greatest treasure hunt that anyone has ever embarked on.

The treasure is truth — each piece of genuine *Da'at*, each moment of real understanding, each truth that breaks through and plants itself in the heart. As the Torah says: *"im tevakshena kakesef, v'chmatmonit tachpesena"* — if you seek it like silver and search for it like hidden treasure. (*Proverbs 2:4*) Because truth is a treasure. It is real power. Real, transformative, protective power.

*"Tzina v'socherah amito"* — His truth is a shield and armor. (*Psalms 91:4*) The world is a World of Falsehood — and the falsehood is what pulls us down. The lies of the *Nachash* — the primordial serpent whose deception began in the Garden — perpetuated by the *Yetzer HaRa*, the inner adversary, extended by all the forces of the *Sitra Achra*, the other side — like Amalek and others who act as its physical extensions in the world — all of it rests on deception. And our power — the only thing that causes us to rise — is how aligned we are with truth. With each truth found, each treasure recovered from the rubble of falsehood, consciousness is elevated. It is exactly like a software upgrade. You cannot change the hardware — that is in God's hands. But you can upgrade the software. You can install a new program in the heart — a new belief, a new way of seeing — and suddenly the same reality looks completely different.

And this is why the Torah's ways are described as *"darchei noam"* — ways of pleasantness. (*Proverbs 3:17*) And if it is not pleasant — if the path you are on feels like nothing but grinding struggle with no light — that is worth paying attention to. Because

if God says His ways are pleasant, and your experience of his paths is not pleasant, something in the orientation is probably off. Not a reason for self-judgment. A reason to ask: where is the misalignment? What am I missing? What is He trying to show me that I have not yet seen?

The treasure hunt is the asking of those questions. And each answer — each piece of truth that finds its way into the heart — is both the reward and the fuel for the next step.

And this is where it all connects back to the power of speech we established in the previous chapter.

The *Targum* — the ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah — renders the moment of Adam's creation in a striking way. Where the Torah says Adam became a *nefesh chayyah* — a living soul — the *Targum* renders it: "and he became a speaking being." (*Onkelos on Genesis 2:7*) The essence of the human being — what distinguishes us, what gives us our unique power in creation — is *Koch HaDibur*, the power of speech.

We are not bodies that happen to speak. We are speaking beings that happen to inhabit bodies. The voice is not one tool among many. It is the definition of what we are.

And so the entire path comes together: give up the hands — they are God's domain. Reclaim the voice — that is yours. Use the voice to plant truth into the heart. Train the heart to see God operating in every detail of your life. And as that cartoon-vision opens, as *Yirat Hashem* becomes the lens through which reality is perceived — the exile begins to lift. The constriction gives way to spaciousness. The suffering reveals its message. And the relationship with God — carried on through the medium of your life itself, through every experience He sends and every truth you extract from it — becomes the most intimate and most alive relationship you have ever known.

And as that shift deepens — as the cartoon-vision opens wider and *Yirat Hashem* becomes more fully the lens through which you see — something changes in who you are. You give up your hand. And you become a heart.

"*Mi ya'aleh v'har Hashem, u'mi yakum bimkom kodsho?*" — who will ascend the mountain of God, and who will stand in His holy place? (*Psalms 24:3*) The answer: "*N'ki khapayim u'var levav*" — clean of hands and pure of heart. (*Psalms 24:4*) The plain meaning of *bar* here is pure or clean. But *bar* also shares its root with the word for son in Aramaic — as in *bar mitzvah*, a son of the commandment. And on the level of deeper reading, the text is pointing to something even more precise: not just someone who has

a pure heart, but someone who has become entirely a product of the heart — a son of the heart, whose whole identity has relocated there. The one who ascends God's mountain is not the one who built his way up by the strength of his hands — it is the one who surrendered the hands and relocated entirely to the heart. A *bar levav* — a son of the heart. The playing field is the heart. The voice plants truth into the heart. And *Yirat Hashem* is the heart's way of seeing.

*"Reishit chochmah yirat Hashem"* — the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God.  
(*Psalms 111:10*)

Before we close this chapter, there is one more thing that must be said — because no book on healing and walking the path of life would be complete without it.

If you are not regularly talking to God in your own words, from your heart, this is something you need to begin doing immediately. Not scripted prayer alone — though that is precious and important — but the spontaneous, personal, intimate conversation between you and your Creator, in whatever language flows naturally from you, about whatever is alive in you in that moment.

This practice is ancient and woven throughout all of our sacred literature. Every one of our forefathers engaged in it constantly. It is the foundation of a genuine relationship with God. It is the ultimate fulfillment of *"Harchev picha va'amaleyhu"* — open your mouth wide and I will fill it. The more you engage in this throughout your day — in the morning, in the middle of ordinary tasks, in moments of difficulty, in moments of gratitude — the more results you will see, the closer you will feel to the Creator, and the more solid and real your relationship with Him will become. This is not a technique. It is a relationship. And like any relationship, it grows through consistent, honest, open communication.

Not the destination. The beginning. The first step into a world where everything is communication, everything is intentional, everything is His hand moving through the cartoon of your life — pointing you, always, toward the truth that sets you free.

## Chapter Nine — What Remains

We have come a long way together. We have mapped the inner world — the beliefs, the inner programming that generates our emotional states and drives our physical condition. We have established where our power lives — in the voice, in the mouth, in the heart. We have begun to understand what *Yirat Hashem* looks like — seeing God as the cause of all causes, receiving every experience as His communication, making the shift from movie-consciousness to cartoon-consciousness.

And now we arrive at something that ties all of it together. Something so woven into the fabric of existence, so foundational to everything we have been building, that not knowing it becomes a person's own kryptonite. It is the reason people fall off the wagon — spiritually, emotionally, in healing, in any meaningful endeavor they undertake. It is the backbone of *Yirat Hashem*. It defines those who will reach the place God has reserved for the truly special. And yet most people do not even know it exists as a Torah concept, let alone a foundational one.

We are talking about *Hamtein* — waiting.

The Talmud opens a door with a single, astonishing statement:

"*Ayin lo ra'atah Elokim zulatkha ya'aseh l'mechakeh lo*" — no eye has seen, O God, besides You, what You will do for the one who waits for Him. (*Isaiah 64:3, as cited in Berachot 34b*)

No eye has seen it. Not Adam when he walked in the Garden at the height of human consciousness. Not Moshe, our teacher when he ascended to the heavens and received the Torah from God Himself. Whatever God has prepared in this hidden place — it is beyond anything that has ever been seen by human eyes.

And for whom has He prepared it? For the *tzaddik* — the righteous one? For the *talmid chacham* — the Torah scholar? For the *gadol hador* — the greatest of the generation? Perhaps it is for them. But the verse does not say that. It identifies the recipient in two words: *mechakeh lo*. The one who waits for Him.

Let that land.

There is another moment in the Torah that illuminates just how profound this concept is. When Moshe, our teacher was in his most intimate conversation with God —

asking "*Har'eini na et kevodecha*" — show me Your glory — God revealed to him the thirteen attributes of mercy. These are the deepest descriptions of God's nature available to human understanding: kindness for thousands of generations, carrying sin and transgression, all the towering revelations of divine compassion.

And then the Talmud asks: what was it that caused Moshe to fall on his face at that moment? (*Sanhedrin 111a*) Of all the sublime attributes being revealed — why did he fall prostrate in that particular instant?

The answer: *Erech Apayim* — literally, the lengthening of the nostrils. The attribute of patience. Of waiting. Of unhurried, inexhaustible forbearance.

Now — for anyone unfamiliar with how Hebrew works — this requires a moment of explanation. The words *erech apayim* translate literally as "the lengthening of the nostrils." To a modern reader that may sound strange. But in biblical Hebrew, the nostrils are intimately connected with breath, and breath — as we established in Chapter Seven — is the physical expression of the soul's state. Short breath is constriction, urgency, the inability to wait. Lengthened breath is openness, patience, the capacity to hold space for what has not yet arrived. So when the Torah names this attribute *erech apayim* — the lengthened nostrils — it is describing, through the language of the body, the inner state of infinite patience. God's breath, so to speak, is never short. His capacity to wait — for us, with us, for what is not yet ready — is without limit. That is the attribute Moshe encountered. And that is why he fell on his face.

Of everything God showed him — of all the heights and depths of divine compassion — it was the attribute of waiting that broke Moshe open. That caused him, the greatest human being who ever lived, to fall on his face.

We will return to this. But first we need to understand what *Hamtein* actually is — and why it sits at the heart of everything.

The Talmud teaches: "*Ha ba litaher — mesayim oto*" — one who comes to purify himself, they help him. (*Yoma 38b*) But look at the teaching from a deeper angle. When someone begins the journey of inner purification — when they turn toward God and say: I want to change, I want to grow — how exactly do they help him? What is the first gift given to someone setting out on this path?

They teach him the secret of *Hamtein*. Waiting. That is how they help him.

Not a technique. Not a practice. Not a set of rules. The first thing a person receives when they genuinely begin the inner journey is the secret of waiting.

Why? Because *Hamtein* is the seal of the side of holiness. It is the structural divide between *Kedushah* — holiness — and the *Sitra Achra* — the other side.

The dark side operates on a credit card model: enjoy now, pay with interest later. You swipe the card — the gratification is immediate, the pleasure is real — but the bill arrives afterward, and it arrives with interest. What costs three thousand ends up costing four thousand. Esau builds his kingdoms now. The nations enjoy their dominion now. They get the immediate reward — and pay the compounding price later.

The side of holiness is the precise inverse: invest now, receive with interest later. The work comes first. The reward comes after — and it compounds. The Jewish nation is born in suffering, born into the mud pits of Egypt with a whip on their back, forged through a long and bitter exile, before the *Geulah* — the redemption — arrives. The birth pains come before the birth. The investment precedes the return.

The Talmud in tractate Avodah Zarah describes a vision of the end of days: when the nations of the world witness what the Jewish people are receiving — the fulfillment of the long investment of exile — they will cry out and demand their share. And God's response is simply this: whoever did not prepare before Shabbat, from where will they eat on Shabbat? The question answers itself. The Jewish people are harvesting exactly what they planted during the long centuries of exile and suffering. The return corresponds precisely to what was invested. Not a single seed goes unaccounted for. (*Avodah Zarah 3a*)

*A note on the universality of this path:*

(And yet this passage carries an invitation as much as a verdict. During this time — right now, in the time that remains — anyone can plant. This path is not meant only for the Jewish people. The responsibility of being a light unto the nations is precisely this: to bring all of humanity to this very path of life — for the whole world to return to their Creator and walk in His ways. Anyone who turns toward God can put in the work now and partake in the harvest alongside them. The field is still open. And of all such people — of every person who plants now in the time of tears — the Psalmist speaks: *hazorim b'dima b'rina yuktsorah* — those who plant in tears will harvest in joy. (*Psalms 126:5*))

We see this even at the very beginning. Had Adam waited — had he held back from the *Eitz HaDa'at* until after Shabbat — the fruit would have been ripe and the eating

would have been permitted. Because Shabbat itself is *Emunah* — faith — and with *Emunah* as the foundation, he could have engaged with the *Eitz HaDa'at* without damage. The entire catastrophe of the Garden was, at its root, a failure of waiting. He did not wait for the fruit to be ripe. He ate too soon. And that too-early eating is the archetype of everything that has gone wrong since.

This connection between waiting and *Yirat Hashem* is not incidental — it is explicit in two places in Psalms:

"*Hineh ein Hashem el yere'av, l'meyachalim l'chasdo*" — behold, the eye of God is toward those who fear Him, toward those who await His kindness. (*Psalms 33:18*)

And again: "*Rotze Hashem et yere'av, et hameyachalim l'chasdo*" — God desires those who fear Him, those who await His kindness. (*Psalms 147:11*)

Both verses link *Yirat Hashem* directly to awaiting His kindness. The one who fears God — who genuinely sees Him as the cause of all causes, who has given up the illusion of hand-power — is precisely the one who awaits His kindness. So what these verses are telling us is this: who are those who fear God? What defines someone who fears God? Those who await His kindness. The seeing produces the waiting. When you truly understand that everything is in His hands, what is left for you to do but pray, seek, and wait?

Now here is a question that the entire journey raises — and that the concept of *Hamtein* answers with extraordinary clarity.

The Talmud says explicitly: "*Imalei HaKadosh Baruch Hu she'ozar lo, lo yuchal lo*" — were it not that the Holy One helps him, he could not prevail against it. (*Kiddushin 30b*) God created a *Yetzer HaRa* — an inner adversary — that we simply cannot defeat on our own.

Why? If God wants to test us, why not create a fifty-fifty opponent? Put us in the ring, run five rounds, and see who comes out ahead. Why stack the deck so completely against us that without divine intervention we simply cannot win?

But now — through everything we have built — the answer is clear. The objective was never to defeat the *Yetzer HaRa* by the strength of our hands. The objective is to arrive at the recognition that we cannot — and to turn to God, and wait for His salvation. A *Yetzer HaRa* we could beat on our own would only reinforce the illusion of hand-power. It would never teach us the thing we most need to learn.

And this same logic illuminates something that has troubled people for generations: *Yeridas HaDoros* — the descent of the generations. Each generation falls lower into darkness. More obligations, more temptations, more places to stumble — more constrictions, and more constricted consciousness. If Adam fell on the highest level with a single prohibition, how are we — on a far lower level with hundreds of obligations — supposed to manage?

But seen through the lens of *Hamtein*, the answer is not cruel — it is merciful. The harder it gets, the more obvious it becomes that we cannot do this alone. The more impossible it feels, the more naturally we let go. The more clearly we see that the hands are not the answer, the more readily we turn to the only One who can actually help. *Yeridas HaDoros* is God making it progressively easier to arrive at the realization that we need Him. The descent is an act of compassion.

And all of this is demonstrated in the Talmud, in tractate Sotah 49b, where the Sages describe the final generation before the Messianic era — the state the world will have fallen to by that point. All truth will have eroded. All morality. All integrity. The very structures of human civilization will be crumbling. And at the very end of that passage, after cataloguing the depths of the collapse, the Talmud concludes: we have no one to rely on except our Father in Heaven. That is the point. That is what the descent is for. As we fall lower and lower, as the illusion of human self-sufficiency becomes harder and harder to maintain, we will have no choice but to arrive at the one conclusion that matters: there is no one to lean on but God. The harder it gets, the clearer the truth becomes.

There is one more dimension to *Hamtein* that deserves its own moment — and it comes from an unexpected place.

Every morning, many people recite the *Baraita* of Rabbi Yishmael — the thirteen rules by which the Torah is interpreted and expounded. The final rule, the thirteenth, goes like this: when two verses appear to contradict one another, you wait — *ad* — until a third verse arrives and resolves the contradiction between them.

*Ad* means until. It is a waiting period built into the very structure of Torah interpretation itself. When you encounter a contradiction you cannot resolve — two truths that seem to cancel each other out — you do not force a resolution. And you certainly don't shoot down one side to establish the side that fits better with your worldview. You set it aside. You leave the file open. You ask God to help you understand, and you wait until the answer comes.

This is not merely a rule of textual interpretation. It is the template for the entire journey of truth-seeking. Because too often, when we encounter a question we cannot resolve — a contradiction in our understanding, a suffering we cannot make sense of — we rush to close the file. The ego cannot tolerate "I don't know." It is genuinely painful — cognitive dissonance — real psychological pain, a literal discomfort that the ego will do almost anything to escape. So we grab the first available answer, however shallow, however incomplete, just to end the discomfort. And we tend to shoot down one side in support of our already established "truths" — because not doing so threatens to bring down our house of cards. The file is closed. The question is answered. We move on.

And in doing so, we shut the door on the true answer that was already on its way.

Had we waited — had we held the question open with patience rather than stuffing it with the first thing that somewhat fit — or fit in the way we preferred it to — a deeper truth would have arrived. But the moment we declare "I know" and close the file, we have built a house of cards. And now we must defend it — aggressively, reflexively — because anyone who challenges our answer threatens to collapse the entire constructed world we built on top of it. Any amount of questioning would collapse it entirely and send us spiraling into the chaos of "I don't know" — which is unacceptable and downright terrifying.

This is why a person can become hostile to genuine inquiry and debate. Not because they are bad. But because their house of cards' survival is threatened by honest questioning.

This is one of the reasons the Torah was given specifically through Moshe, our teacher — the humblest of all men. (*Numbers 12:3*) And why it was given in the desert — not on an impressive mountain, not in a palace, but in an ownerless wilderness that belongs to no one. The Talmud tells us: Torah only goes to the humble. Humility is the doorway. And humility, in this context, means the capacity to stand in "I don't know" — to be able to admit when we are wrong or have made a mistake — and to hold a question open without forcing it closed. To wait for the answer rather than manufacturing one. As the Sages taught: "Teach your tongue to say 'I do not know,' lest you invent something and be caught out." (*Berachot 4a*) And to always be ready and willing to change our view toward what His truth is — rather than bending His truth to match ours.

And why a desert specifically? Think about it. Our cities are teeming with life. The jungle is teeming with life. The oceans are teeming with life. Even the air itself is

teeming with life. But the desert is the most desolate place on earth — empty, stripped of everything, belonging to no one. One who makes himself like a desert is one who has become that empty: who does not need to hold on to being right, who does not need to fill every silence with an answer, who can remain in the "I don't know" without collapsing under its weight. That is the one to whom the Torah goes. The one who has made themselves available — empty enough to receive.

The Rambam — Maimonides — puts it with stunning precision: the end of all knowledge is to know that you do not know. The ego fears that state. The truth-seeker learns to embrace it.

Now let us turn to a passage in the Torah that most people read quickly and pass over — but that, when you feel its full weight, is a passage of extraordinary importance in the book of Numbers.

The Torah describes what happened when the Tabernacle — God's portable dwelling place in the desert — was first erected. A cloud descended and covered it. When the cloud lifted, the Jewish people traveled. When the cloud rested, they encamped. Simple enough.

But then the Torah does something unusual. It repeats this principle. Again and again and again. For a morning. For a day. For two days. For a month. For a year. The cloud lifts — they travel. The cloud rests — they encamp. "*Al pi Hashem yachanu v'al pi Hashem yisa'u — mishmeret Hashem shamaru*" — according to God's word they encamped and according to God's word they traveled — the charge of God they safeguarded. (*Numbers 9:18*)

The redundancy is extraordinary. Why does the Torah hammer this point so repeatedly for something so simple?

Because this repetition IS the teaching.

You do not control the pace.

God could have taken the Israelites from Egypt to the Land of Israel in three days. He chose not to. He took them the long way around. And when they stumbled and sinned, it took even longer — forty years in total. The pace was set according to what they needed. The vessels that had to be built. The levels that had to be passed through. The things that needed to be uncovered before they could move forward.

The same is true for each of us. Sometimes the cloud lifts quickly — a breakthrough arrives, a transformation happens, a sudden clarity opens the way forward. And sometimes we are encamped for what feels like an unbearable stretch — month after month, year after year, feeling stuck, feeling like nothing is moving, feeling like everyone around us is traveling while we remain in the same place.

*Mishmeret Hashem* — guarding the trust in God — means surrendering the pace to Him. Not demanding it move faster. Not declaring: I am done waiting, I will figure this out myself. Staying in the camp when the cloud rests. Moving when it lifts. And trusting that the timing is His — not because He is indifferent to your suffering, but because He sees exactly what you need and exactly when you will be ready to receive it.

Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers. Then sold into slavery. Then thrown into prison on a false accusation. Ten years. Eleven years. Twelve years. He did not control when the cloud lifted. He did not manufacture his own breakthrough. He waited.

And when the cloud finally lifted, he became the viceroy of Egypt — and the very instrument through which his family and an entire civilization was saved.

This brings us to the deepest truth about *Hamtein*.

If everything is in God's hands — if our free choice operates through inner speech and belief, not through controlling outcomes — then at a certain point of genuine reckoning, a person arrives at a stark and clarifying realization: there is nothing left to do but wait.

Not as passive resignation. Not as giving up. But as the logical, inevitable conclusion of truly internalizing *Yirat Hashem*. When you have genuinely surrendered the hands — when you have accepted that the pace is His, the breakthrough is His, the healing is His, the outcome is His — what remains? You pray. You seek. You keep showing up. And you wait.

This is not one option among many. It is the only thing left. And that is precisely why it becomes the most important thing.

And this is why the reward — the unimaginable reward no eye has seen — is specifically for *mechakeh lo*. The one who waits for Him. Not because waiting is passive or easy. But because waiting is the fullest expression of everything we have been

building toward. It is the complete surrender of the hand. It is *lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi* — not by might and not by strength, but by My spirit. (*Zechariah 4:6*)

Waiting is what you give God when you have attributed everything else to Him.

Moshe fell on his face. Now we understand why.

There is a beautiful example of this principle embedded in the Jewish calendar itself — one that, at the time of writing this book, was unfolding in real time.

The period between the holiday of Passover and the holiday of Shavuot — a span of exactly fifty days — is known as the Omer. Every single day of those fifty days, we count. We say: today is the first day of the Omer. Today is the seventh. Today is the twenty-third. And so on, all the way to 49 (7 x 7, seven weeks total).

Why do we count?

Passover marks the liberation from Egypt — from personal and collective exile. But liberation from something is not yet arrival at something. We were freed from slavery, yes. But we had not yet received the Torah. Shavuot — the fiftieth day — is the celebration of that receiving, the moment the Torah was given at Sinai.

And the counting? The counting is the waiting. Specifically, it is the waiting expressed as anticipation. You count down the days toward something only when you are genuinely looking forward to it — when the arrival matters to you enough that you are tracking the distance between now and then. The Kabbalistic tradition teaches that this counting also serves as a process of purification — each day peeling away another layer of the *klipot*, the spiritual husks and parasitic forces that cling to a person and suppress the light of the soul. Through the waiting, through the anticipating, through the daily act of counting toward something precious, we are purified and prepared to receive what is coming.

Let that sink in. The preparation for receiving God's Word — for the greatest spiritual gift ever given — was fifty days of waiting and counting. Not effort. Not performance. Anticipation. The willingness to wait with full attention and full longing for what has not yet arrived.

And on account of this Kabbalistic teaching, many people add a prayer after counting the Omer — a prayer that concludes that God gave us this counting in order to purify us and to make us holy, to bring down blessing to the world, and to correct our souls and spirits from every impurity. All by counting. By waiting. Let that land fully.

Waiting is able to fix us, correct us, purify us, and bring down the blessing. The counting — the day-by-day act of anticipatory waiting — is itself the instrument of repair.

That is *Hamtein* in its most formalized, most communal expression. And it is the model for every personal journey toward receiving what God is preparing to give.

And the waiting continues — beyond the individual, into the collective. It echoes in the oldest and most constant declaration of Jewish faith:

*"Ani ma'amin b'emunah shleimah b'vias haMoshiach — v'af al pi sheyitmahmeha, im kol zeh achakeh lo b'chol yom sheyavo"* — I believe with complete faith in the coming of Moshiach — and even though he delays, I wait for him every single day.

In other words, we are waiting for the day when we finally achieve the true connection with God — when He comes down and lives with us in this world, lives with us in our heart, when His word fills our heart. As it is written: “the world will be filled with the knowledge of God.” When we finally achieve the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life. That is what we are waiting for.

We have been waiting for a very long time. And yet the declaration is not one of resignation — it is one of the most powerful expressions of trust in the history of human consciousness. Every day that we do not give up is a day of waiting. And every day of waiting is a day of *Yirat Hashem*. And every day of *Yirat Hashem* is a day of *Emunah*.

The individual's waiting and the nation's waiting are the same thing at different scales. The same principle, the same trust, the same gift given to God when there is nothing else left to give.

One more thing must be said before we move to what waiting looks like in practice — because it is easy to misread everything above as a call to passivity. It is not.

Waiting is not sitting still and doing nothing. It is not giving up on growth or seeking or asking. While we wait — while the cloud rests — we continue. We grow in understanding. We ask questions. We seek truth. We bring our words and our prayers and our honest effort. We show up every day and do what we can that day.

We are seekers. That does not stop. What stops is the forcing. What stops is the demanding that outcomes arrive on our timeline. What stops is the ego's illusion that if we just push hard enough we can make the cloud lift.

You give God the pace. You keep doing the work.

That is *Hamtein*. That is the backbone of *Yirat Hashem*. That is the teaching that caused the greatest human being who ever lived to fall on his face before the infinite patience of his Creator.

## Chapter Ten — Waiting in Practice

*Hamtein* — waiting — runs deeper than you thought. We established its theology in the previous chapter: the backbone of *Yirat Hashem* — the awe of God — the seal of holiness, the ultimate gift to God when everything else has been attributed to Him. But a concept of this magnitude does not stay at the level of theology. It reaches into every corner of daily life — into the smallest moments of the ordinary day, into the way we approach our own healing, into the quality of every single inner reaction we have. That is what this chapter is about.

Waiting, lived from the inside.

The longer you are made to wait for something, the more your trust is revealed.

Consider a simple scenario. A wealthy man — a person known for his integrity, someone whose word has never once been broken — announces publicly that he will give one hundred thousand dollars to anyone willing to wait for him until he returns. People gather. The excitement is real. A hundred thousand dollars. How long could it take?

A day passes. Then two. Then five. People start drifting away. He's playing games. This is ridiculous. Nobody actually gives away that kind of money. We're the fools standing here waiting. They leave one by one, shaking their heads, returning to their ordinary lives.

But the people who know this man — who have seen him keep his word in situations that cost him far more than money — they stay. Not because waiting is comfortable. Because they know him. They know his word is iron. And no matter how long it takes, they are going to be there when he returns. Even if it takes a month. Even if it takes two.

The last ones standing are the ones who trust the most.

This is the entire story of the Jewish people in exile. We have been waiting for a very long time. Most of the world has moved on, made peace with the darkness, arranged their affairs within the constraints of a broken reality. And we are still here. Still waiting. Still declaring every day: *v'af al pi sheyitmahmeha* — and even though He delays, I wait.

Not giving up is also waiting. Let that sink in fully. *Yeush* — despair — is the decision to leave the game. To throw in the towel, declare that nothing is coming, and stop showing up. Every day that you do not give up — every day that you return to the practice, return to the seeking, return to the prayer even when nothing seems to be moving — you are waiting. And waiting is trusting.

Because in a very real sense, waiting is believing. It is *Emunah* — lived faith — in its most active and costly form. It is trust in God — not as an idea held in the mind but as a posture held in the body, day after day, in the face of everything that seems to contradict it. The one who waits is the one who believes. They are the same person.

This principle — that delayed gratification is the structure of how growth actually works — is not only a spiritual truth. It is woven into the fabric of life itself.

Think of the person who decides to build a business. They leave the safety of a steady paycheck — the immediate, reliable gratification of a monthly salary — and they begin building something that may take years to produce a return. In the beginning they are not gaining. They are losing — money, time, sleep, certainty. They delay the immediate reward for the promise of something larger that is not yet visible. And the ones who stay the course, who do not abandon the process in the middle when nothing seems to be working, are the ones who eventually see what they were building all along.

Or the medical student who spends eight years in training — anatomy, physiology, sleepless nights, years of deferred income — while their friends are out living their lives. Why? Because they can see past the immediate discomfort to the other side of the waiting. The discipline of delay is the price of the destination.

And in a now-famous experiment at Stanford University, researchers gave young children a simple choice: one marshmallow now, or two marshmallows if you wait ten minutes. Most children could not hold out. The immediate reward was too present, too real, too available. But the children who could wait — who could sit with the discomfort of wanting and not taking — tended to show better outcomes later in life across a range of measures. Psychology is normally very hesitant to draw conclusions from children's early behavior, since children are so malleable and changeable. And subsequent research has complicated the picture further. But the basic correlation — that the capacity to delay gratification is connected to later flourishing — has remained a recurring finding, striking enough to be worth noting.

We bring this as a *mashal* — a parable, an analogy — not as the primary argument. The Torah established this principle long before any experiment was designed to test it. But it is striking confirmation that what God built into the structure of holiness is also built into the structure of how life actually works.

Now here is where this becomes directly practical for the person trying to heal.

When we set out to change — to heal the inner world, to release the old programming, to shift from the ego's paradigm to the soul's — two routes present themselves. The first is the dramatic route: the big push, the massive undertaking, the attempt to completely transform everything at once. Go all in. Maximum effort. Skip the stages and get to the results fast.

The *Yetzer HaRa* — the inner voice of self-destruction — loves this route. It loves it for two reasons. First, because enormous effort feels like accomplishment — it feels like you are doing something, taking control, moving the needle. And second, because the ego wants it done quickly. It does not want to wait. It wants the result now, and if a massive effort seems like it might shortcut the timeline, the ego is entirely in favor.

But this is not how healing works. And this is not how growth works. Burning yourself out on a dramatic push that produces no visible results leads straight to the cycle we know too well: enormous effort — no results — despair — give up. Then the guilt of having given up. Then a new enormous effort. And so on.

The true method — the one that actually works, the one that is consistent with everything we have built — is *la'at la'at* — gradually, steadily. Small bites you can actually chew, done consistently over a long period of time. Not overwhelming. Not dramatic. Not trying to skip stages. Just showing up every day and doing what you can do that day.

And here the Psalmist gives us the precise image: "*Od me'at v'ein rasha, v'hitbonanta al mekomo v'einenu*" — just a little more, and the wicked one is gone; contemplate his place inwardly and he is not there. (*Psalms 37:10*) The emphasis here is on *od me'at* — just a little more. Not a heroic leap. Not a dramatic transformation. Just a little more. A little more awareness, a little more consistency, a little more showing up — and the darkness that seemed immovable begins to thin. The inner adversary, observed and waited out rather than fought and forced, loses its grip. Little by little. Day by day.

Why? Because the breakthroughs are in God's hands. The cloud lifts when He lifts it — not when you push hard enough. Your job is the process. His job is the pace. The moment you genuinely understand this, you can put down the exhausting effort of trying to force results and simply do the work that is yours to do — today, in this moment, with what is in front of you.

And this connects directly to the image of the cloud.

Sometimes the cloud lifts and there is sudden clarity — the fog lifts, the path forward opens, a truth crystallizes that had been elusive for months. A breakthrough. A transformation. A moment of genuine inner shift that you can feel in your body. These moments are real and they are gifts.

And sometimes — often — we feel stuck in the cloud. Brain fog. Confusion. The sense of not moving, not growing, not getting anywhere. The motivation drains away. Nothing seems to be clicking. Day after day in the same place, and it feels like the cloud will never lift.

On those days — especially on those days — the work is simply to stay consistent and not journey before the cloud lifts. Do not force it. Do not manufacture a breakthrough. Do not abandon the process because the results are not yet visible. Show up. Do your small step. And wait.

Because what looks like being stuck is often the building of a vessel. The very immobility that feels like failure is sometimes the thing that needs to happen — the pressure that cracks something open, the silence that allows something to settle, the ideas that you need to sit with long enough to become aware of what you are actually staring at, the stillness in which something beneath the surface is being prepared that will only become visible when the cloud finally lifts.

But *Hamtein* — waiting — does not only operate on the grand scale of exile and redemption, of healing timelines and spiritual journeys. It operates in the smallest moments of every single day.

Right now — in this moment, and in every moment that follows — there is a version of this choice available to you.

When the unconscious reaction pulls at you — sudden anger at something someone said, resentment that flares up without warning, the old fear or shame flooding back in — there is a split second available. A gap. A pause that exists between the trigger and

the response. The *Yetzer HaRa*'s — the inner adversary's — offer in that moment is always the same: react now. Let it out. Feel the release. And the pull is powerful — we are, if we are honest, almost addicted to the reaction. The explosion of anger, the flood of resentment, the indulgent spiral of victimhood and complaining — these feel good in the moment, in the way that any instant gratification does. We jump straight to them. And once we are in them, the inner voice takes over completely: he said, she said, he did this, she did that, why does this always happen to me — and the spiral tightens, carrying us further and further from our center.

The holy pause is the micro-version of *Hamtein*. In that split second — stop. Return to the *Neshimah* — the breath — as we discussed in Chapter Seven. The breath shuts down the amygdala, the brain's fight-or-flight center, and brings you back to your center. And then step back into the Observer — look at the emotion rather than being swept into it. "*V'hitbonanta al mekomo v'einenu*" — contemplate his place inwardly and he is not there. (*Psalms 37:10*) The emotion, observed directly from the inside rather than reacted to, begins to lose its grip. What felt overwhelming a moment ago starts to thin under the steady gaze of the watching soul.

The pause is waiting. The reaction is instant gratification. Every time you choose the pause over the reaction — every time you stop, breathe, and observe rather than explode — you are choosing to strengthen the side of light and soul over the side of darkness and ego — in the most live and real arena available: your own inner world, in this moment, right now.

Because what we are trying to get out of — the states that suppress healing and keep us locked in the downward spiral — are precisely these: anger, resentment, sadness, anxiety, victimhood. The low, contracted states that drain the life from the body and feed the darkness within. And the way out of them is not to fight them or suppress them or argue them away. It is to find the pause in the middle of the storm. To stop. To breathe. To observe. That pause — that holy, powerful pause — is where healing begins.

Releasing — the ongoing work of letting go of old programming, old pain, old reactions — is itself the ultimate act of waiting. It is the non-reactive response to life. Not passive, not defeated, but deliberately choosing not to be pulled into the automatic. I will not react. I will observe. I will let God work through what is here rather than forcing my way through it. That is *Erech Apayim* — the lengthening of the nostrils, the divine

patience — embodied in a human moment. That is what it looks like when *Hamtein* lives in the body rather than in the mind.

There is an old saying from the Talmud: "*Kol hadochek et hasha'ah — hasha'ah dochato; v'chol hanidcheh mipnei hasha'ah — hasha'ah nidachet mipanav*" — whoever pushes against the hour (time), the hour pushes back against him; but whoever yields before the hour, the hour yields before him. (*Berachot 64a; also Eruvin 13b*)

When you force — when you demand results on your timeline, insist that the cloud lift on your schedule, push against the pace that God has set — the world around you squeezes back. Events tighten. The resistance increases. The harder you push, the more solid the wall becomes.

Because the opposite of genuine trust in God — is forcing. And trust in God is by definition a relaxed state. Not passive, not indifferent, not collapsed — relaxed. I trust God. Time is in His hands. There is no rush, because I cannot change the timeline anyway. And in that trust, that surrender, that willingness to wait — there is peace. A peace that the hands-paradigm can never provide, because the hands are always scrambling, always trying, always falling short of the control they are seeking.

You settle in. You breathe. You know you are on your way out — even when you cannot feel it moving. Even when the cloud is thick and the path is invisible. Especially then.

Because knowing you are on your way out — even when you cannot feel it — is precisely what *Emunah* — lived faith, the soul's faculty of trust — actually is.

And *Emunah*, lived from the inside, in the middle of the waiting, in the middle of the not-knowing, in the middle of the cloud that has not yet lifted — that is *Yirat Hashem* — the awe of God — in its fullest and most beautiful expression.

That is *Hamtein*.

And now the question that everything has been building toward. You have mapped the inner world. You have learned where the power lives. You have begun to see differently. You have learned to wait. But what does all of this produce? What happens to the one who actually does this — who surrenders the hands, plants truth in the heart, trains the inner eye to see God in every detail, and chooses the pause over the reaction day after day after day?

The prophet Isaiah answers:

"*V'kovei Hashem yachalifu choach, ya'alu ever kansharim, yarutzu v'lo yiy'gu, yelchu v'lo yiy'afu*" — but those who wait upon God will exchange their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint. (*Isaiah 40:31*)

*Ko'vei Hashem* — those who wait upon God. The word *ko'vei* carries both meanings simultaneously: to hope and to wait. In Hebrew they are not separate experiences. To genuinely hope in God is to wait upon Him. To genuinely wait upon Him is to be filled with hope. They are two faces of the same inner posture.

And what happens to this person? They do not merely survive the waiting. They do not simply endure until the breakthrough arrives. Something far more radical occurs. *Yachalifu choach* — they exchange their strength. The old strength — the exhausted, straining, ego-driven strength of *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — the exhausted strength that has been fighting and forcing and running on fumes — is traded in. And what comes back is not more of the same. It is something of an entirely different order. Wings. *Ya'alu ever kansharim* — they will soar on wings like eagles.

This is the answer to the death spiral. This is the answer to the chronic depletion. This is what the entire book has been pointing toward. It was never about managing the suffering better. It was never about developing better coping strategies or building more resilience through sheer will. It was about arriving at the place where the exchange can happen — where you have genuinely put down the old strength and opened your hands — and discovering that what fills them is something you could not have manufactured on your own.

You wait. You give God what remains. And He gives you wings.

## Chapter Eleven — What Is Life?

Until now we have been unraveling the *Cherev HaMithapechet* — the Turning Sword — and how it is related to the identification with the body, the mind, the illusion of hand-power, and everything that follows from that great inversion. That has been the work we have done together: mapping the confusion, naming the deception, and beginning the long process of turning right-side up what has been living upside down.

But before we move to the second guardian blocking the path to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life — we need to stop. We need to step back and ask a question that, remarkably, we have not yet asked directly.

What exactly is being guarded? What is it that they are protecting? What precisely is it that we are after?

We have been told — by Moshe, our teacher, in one of the Torah's most urgent commands — "*u'vacharta baChayyim*" — choose life. (*Deuteronomy 30:19*) And God Himself, when He gave us the Torah, called it "*Eitz chayyim hi l'machazikim bah*" — it is a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it. (*Proverbs 3:18*) He is pointing us directly toward it. He wants us there. And yet the way is guarded.

If we are alive now — if life is simply the biological state we are already in — how can we be commanded to choose something we already are?

The question is not rhetorical. It cuts to the heart of everything.

So what is life?

Life is the prize. It is the end of the puzzle. It is what this entire journey is after — what every tool we have developed, every belief we have examined, every layer of illusion we have peeled back has been moving toward. Before we can understand the guardians, we need to understand what they are guarding. Before we can speak about the path to life, we need to understand what life actually is.

Let us start with a question that has been sitting quietly beneath the surface of the entire story of Gan Eden.

When God warned Adam not to eat from the *Eitz HaDa'at* — the Tree of Knowledge — He said: "*Beyom achalcha mimenu mot tamut*" — on the day you eat from it, you will

surely die. (*Genesis 2:17*) But Adam did not die on that day. He lived for another nine hundred and thirty years. So what did God mean “on the day”?

And there is a second strangeness. Before the sin, God never once told Adam he could not eat from the *Eitz HaChayyim*. It was not forbidden. It was there, available, unrestricted. But the moment Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDa'at*, God moved with sudden urgency to drive him out of the garden — specifically to ensure he would not eat from the *Eitz HaChayyim* and live forever. (*Genesis 3:22-23*) Why the sudden concern? What changed in that moment that made the *Eitz HaChayyim* dangerous where it had not been before?

Both questions point to the same answer. And the answer requires us to fundamentally rethink what we mean by life and death.

The Rabbis give us a clue. They teach: the wicked — even while their hearts are beating and their lungs are breathing — are called dead. And the righteous — *aflu b'misam nikra'im chayyim* — even after the body has returned to the earth — are called alive.

This is not poetry. It is a precise statement about the nature of life itself. Life and death, in their deepest meaning, are not biological states. They are states of connection.

And this brings us to something that is not common knowledge — and may even sound controversial at first. But the case for it is built right into the fabric of the Torah itself, and it changes everything.

For easy language, when a person first begins this journey, we say: you are not the body — you are the soul. That much most people can accept. It feels right. It points in the right direction.

But there is a problem with stopping there.

Right now — in our current condition, in the state that every human being inhabits in this world — we are not necessarily alive. And we are not necessarily the soul. We stand between life and death. We are, in the most precise sense, *potential* life forms.

Consider what we say every single morning. The very first words upon waking: “*Modeh ani lefanecha — she'hechezarta bi nishmati*” — I give thanks before You — for You have returned to me *my soul*. (*Morning prayer*) And later, in the morning blessing: “*Elohai, neshama she'natata bi tehorah hi*” — my God, the soul that You placed within me — it is pure.

Notice something. Both of these are in the third person. Not *I am pure* — but *it* is pure. Not *I have been returned* — but *my soul* has been returned to me.

If we were the soul — if our identity and the soul's identity were one and the same — we would not speak of it this way. We would not say *You returned to me my soul* the way you might say *You returned to me my lost object*. The very grammar reveals our condition: we are currently somewhat separate from the soul, relating to it as something we contain or carry rather than something we are.

But equally, we cannot be the body. The body is earth, matter, something that deteriorates and returns to dust. The body is not who we are.

So what are we?

We are the space between. We are the potential — the capacity to connect, to choose, to align. God placed before us life and good, death and evil. Both options are genuinely available. We can choose to connect to the *Neshamah* — the soul — and through that connection, come alive. Or we can remain connected primarily to the body and the mind — and remain in a state that the Torah calls death, even while the biological machinery continues to run.

Before the sin, Adam was not in a state of potential. He was in a state of life. He was connected to the soul — he *was* the soul, wearing a body of light, seeing through the soul's single eye, the body a garment and nothing more. That state of genuine aliveness — that direct, unobstructed connection to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — is precisely what was lost when he ate from the tree. The fall was not merely a moral failure. It was the fall from life itself, from the state of being genuinely alive, into the in-between — the state of potential that we now inhabit.

As it says: “*Vayipach b'apav nishmat chayyim, vayehi ha'adam l'nefesh chayah*” — He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul. (*Genesis 2:7*)

This is what God meant when He said “*on the day you eat from it you will die.*” Not the biological death of the body — that came much later. The immediate death was the severance. The disconnection from life in its true meaning. The collapse from genuine aliveness into the state of potential. And the body dying — the physical return to earth — is itself the symbol of that inner truth, whose full meaning we will address when we come to the *KrUVim*.

We stand between life and death. And this journey — this entire journey we are on together — is called life because it literally is life. The work of choosing the soul, connecting to it, impressing its message upon our conscious mind — this is not a path toward life as a future destination. It is the becoming of life itself, happening in real time, with every step.

Now the question of the *Eitz HaChayyim* opens fully.

Why did God suddenly need to protect it after the sin? Because before the sin, Adam was genuinely alive — connected to the soul, oriented toward the *Eitz HaChayyim* naturally and without obstruction. After the sin — after the collapse into body-identification — the *Eitz HaChayyim* became dangerous in a new way. Not because it changed, but because Adam had changed. A person in a state of deep body-identification, eating from the Tree of Life, would not become truly alive — he would become permanently fixed in his current state, which the Torah calls death. He would live forever — but in the wrong direction. Forever cut off from genuine life rather than forever connected to it. The guardians were not placed there to punish. They were placed there to protect. To preserve the possibility of return.

Now the deepest question: what is it that can actually connect to God? What in us is capable of reaching the *Eitz HaChayyim*?

Not the body. That is clear. The body is matter — it navigates the physical world and then returns to it.

But also — and this is where it gets surprising — not the intellect. Not the mind.

The Rambam — Maimonides — teaches that no human intellect can comprehend God. (*Moreh Nevukhim (Guide for the Perplexed), Part 1, Chapter 52.*) And yet the Torah equally clearly commands us to know God, to pursue God, to cleave to God. It even describes the messianic era as a time when "*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God.*" (*Isaiah 11:9*) And the prophet Jeremiah tells us that the highest form of human glory is precisely this: "*that he understands and knows Me.*" (*Jeremiah 9:23*)

So which is it? Can we know God or can we not?

The resolution lies in understanding what the Rambam is actually saying. He is speaking about the *seychel* — the Human Intellect — cannot comprehend God. And the reason is precise: the intellect is a machine. It is an extraordinary machine — capable of mathematics, language, abstraction, analysis — but it is fundamentally a calculator

designed to navigate time and space. It processes what exists within the dimensions of the physical world. It can work with what it has encountered. But it cannot go beyond itself.

Consider: if you try to imagine the end of space — you travel out, and out, and out, to the farthest reaches of existence — what is beyond the last boundary? Nothing? But you cannot truly imagine nothingness. Forever? But you cannot truly imagine infinity. Neither option is actually imaginable, and yet one of them must be true. The mind hits a wall because it has reached the end of its operational range. It was not built for what lies beyond time and space. And God is beyond time and space.

But the *Neshamah* — the soul — is different. When God said "*I have made you in My image and in My likeness*" (*Genesis 1:27*) — He was not speaking about bodies. He made that explicit the moment He spoke to us at Sinai: do not give Me shapes, do not carve statues, do not assign Me any form of anything that exists in the physical world. (I am beyond all of that.) (*Exodus 20:4*) The image He is speaking of is the soul — the divine breath breathed directly into Adam's nostrils. The soul is the child of the Creator. That is what shares something with the infinite. That is what can connect to the light — and go beyond the intellect of time and space, mathematics, science, and all that the thinking mind can reach. That is what can know God — not through comprehension but through connection.

This is why only the righteous are called alive. Not because they are intellectually superior or biologically different — but because they are connected. Through the soul. Through the orientation of their inner world toward the *Eitz HaChayyim* rather than the *Eitz HaDa'at*. "*V'atem hadveikim b'Hashem Elokeichem chayyim kulchem hayom*" — and you who cleave to God your Creator are alive, all of you, today. (*Deuteronomy 4:4*)

Alive. Because connected.

This brings us to the *Eitz HaDa'at* — the Tree of Knowledge — understood not as a physical tree but as an inner reality. What is the *Eitz HaDa'at* on the level of the human being?

It is the intellect. The mind. The thinking apparatus that we have placed in charge of determining truth.

And think about the word itself. *Da'at* — deep knowing, the integrated wisdom that emerges when soul and intellect work together as God intended. The *Eitz HaDa'at* is broken *Da'at*. Inverted *Da'at*. Not because knowing is wrong — but because this is *Da'at*

severed from its source, the intellect operating in isolation from the soul, declaring itself the authority. It is not about being right or being smart. It is about getting to life. And the intellect operating alone — no matter how sharp, no matter how learned — cannot get you there. It navigates time and space beautifully. It cannot navigate what lies beyond them.

The Torah itself encodes this precise point in the story of the Garden. When the Torah describes Eve looking at the Tree of Knowledge, it uses a striking phrase: “*v’nechmad ha’etz lehaskil*” — the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom, for becoming intellectually enlightened. (*Genesis 3:6*) The word used — *lehaskil* — is the language of intellect, of *sekhel*, of the thinking and reasoning mind. The Torah is telling us precisely what was at the root of the sin: the placement of the intellect on the throne. The desire to grasp and comprehend reality through the mind alone. And that is exactly what the intellect cannot do. It navigates time and space beautifully. It cannot navigate what lies beyond them.

This is the root of the entire inversion. Not that thinking is bad — *Chochma*, wisdom, and *Bina*, the deep internalization of wisdom, are divine gifts, the very fabric of Torah learning. But when the intellect rules rather than serves — when we look to our own understanding as the final arbiter of reality and truth — we are eating from the *Eitz HaDa’at*. We are in the broken *Da’at* that the Turning Sword was named to describe.

And here we encounter another lie that the serpent embedded in our collective consciousness — that by eating from this tree we would know good from evil. But can we truly know good from evil through our own intellect? This is one of the primary deceptions. We cannot. The intellect, operating in isolation from the soul, cannot be the arbiter of what is truly good and what is truly evil. For that, we must turn to the Creator — who alone can guide us and teach us the difference between good and evil, light and darkness. As it says:

The Torah is explicit: “*Betach el Hashem b’chol libecha, v’el binatkha al tisha’en*” — trust in God with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (*Proverbs 3:5*) Not because understanding is worthless — but because leaning on it as the primary authority is the precise error that began in the Garden. *Kochi v’otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — includes the strength of my intellect. Both are forms of the same ego-claim. The hand that grasps for outcomes and the mind that insists on being the authority are two expressions of the same fundamental confusion.

And God, in His extraordinary compassion, gave us a daily physical reminder of exactly this.

"*Ukshartam l'ot al yadecha v'hayu l'totafot bein einecha*" — and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (*Deuteronomy 6:8*)

We take leather straps — the *tefillin* — and we literally bind our hand. We wrap the strap around our arm, constraining it. We place the box upon our head — directly on the brain, between the eyes. And we place it opposite the heart.

Every single morning.

Let that sink in. We tie up our hands. We bind our intellect. We place the reminder over our heart. We wrap the very faculties of ego-control — the hand that grasps for outcomes, the mind that insists on being the authority — and we declare: these are not the source of power. These are not who we are. They are bound. They serve. They are not rulers but instruments.

And we do this because that is the only way to get to the *Eitz HaChayyim*. We have to get out of the broken *Da'at* — out of the inverted knowing, out of the intellect operating in isolation. We have to untie the hand from its illusion of control and free the soul to lead.

It is also worth noting that the Tefillin are called an *Ot* — a sign — in the Torah. (*Exodus 13:16*) A sign for us. But a sign of what, exactly? What does it symbolize? Now we begin to have an answer. Every morning, we bind the hand. We place the reminder on the mind. We draw it against the heart. We are enacting — physically, deliberately — the very movement this entire teaching describes: releasing the hand's claim to control, quieting the intellect's insistence on being the authority, and relocating to the heart. The Tefillin are the sign of that inner movement — worn on the outside to remind us of the work to be done on the inside.

Now here is where belief — the very faculty we have been discussing throughout this book — completes the picture.

We established in an earlier chapter that what we believe shapes our reality at its most fundamental level. The *Neshamah* — the soul — carries an extraordinary power: the power of *Emunah*, the faculty of acceptance, the capacity to invest itself in what it

holds as true and thereby bring it into lived reality. This is not merely a psychological observation. It is a description of how the inner world actually works at its root.

When the soul invests its power of belief into the idea of being the hand — into the body-mind identification, into *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — it is connecting, at the deepest energetic level of its being, to the body. And the body dies. It deteriorates. It returns to the earth. To connect to the body at the root level of belief is to connect to death — not as metaphor, but as the literal nature of what the body is and where it goes.

When the soul instead chooses to see itself as what it truly is — when it invests its power of *Emunah* into the truth of its own divine nature, into the recognition that it is a child of the Creator, made in His image, capable of connecting to what lies beyond time and space — that belief manifests as actual connection to the soul. And connection to the soul is connection to life. The believing and the becoming are the same movement.

There is one more layer to what it means to step into the soul — and it connects back to something we established much earlier in this journey.

We said that God interacts with us through two primary attributes: *Midat HaDin* — the attribute of judgment — and *Midat HaRachamim* — the attribute of mercy. And we established that which one we encounter is largely determined by what we activate through our perception and inner orientation.

Now we can understand precisely why. The Torah tells us: "*Banim atem l'Hashem Elokeichem*" — you are children of God your Creator. (*Deuteronomy 14:1*) And we have established throughout this book that it is the soul — the *Neshamah* — that is the child. Not the body. The soul is the child of the King.

And how does a father relate to his child? With mercy. With compassion. A son is given the benefit of the doubt. A son is forgiven. A son is loved with a love that does not depend on performance. This is the attribute of mercy — *Midat HaRachamim* — which is the natural relationship between a father and his child.

A servant, however, is related to through judgment. Did you do the work? Here is your reward. Did you fail in your duties? Here is your consequence. The relationship is transactional. The attribute governing it is *Midat HaDin*.

When a person lives from the ego — when the body-mind is in charge, when the servant is sitting on the throne — they are, at the level of their inner identity, a servant.

And they are governed accordingly. *Midat HaDin* is what they encounter, because that is the attribute that corresponds to where they are standing.

But when a person steps into the soul — when the true prince reclaims his throne, when identity relocates from the body to the *Neshamah* — they are standing as a child of the King. And *Midat HaRachamim* is what they encounter. Not because God has changed. Because they have changed their position. They have moved from servant to son. And the mercy that was always available — infinite, inexhaustible, extending even to someone like Menashe in his boiling cauldron — flows toward them as the natural expression of the relationship they are now standing in.

This is the full meaning of choosing life. Not only choosing to connect to the soul. Choosing to stand as a child.

This is the full meaning of "*u'vacharta baChayyim*" — choose life. The choosing is not an act of the hand. It is an act of the *Neshamah* — a reorientation of belief, a redirecting of the faculty of *Emunah* from the body's illusion toward the soul's truth.

In other words, it is a *seeing*. As Moshe said: "*Re'eh — natati lefanecha hayom et haChayyim v'et hatov, v'et hamavet v'et hara*" — see, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil. (*Deuteronomy 30:15*) He did not say *hinei* — behold, as a passive announcement. He said *re'eh* — see. Because the choosing of life is first a seeing of life — a clear-eyed recognition of what life actually is, where it lives, and what connects us to it. When that seeing opens, the choosing is not a struggle. It is the only logical response to what has been seen.

So what is life? What is the *Eitz HaChayyim* we are trying to reach?

Life is connection to the soul. Life is the state of having your inner orientation aligned with the *Neshamah* rather than with the body-mind. Life is the condition in which *Chochma* — wisdom received through Torah, by means of the intellect — and *Bina* — the deeper understanding that comes from the awakening soul — unite to create true *Da'at*. Not the broken *Da'at* of the intellect ruling in isolation — but the integrated, soul-rooted *Da'at* that knows God, not by comprehending Him but by cleaving to Him. And that cleaving is alive. That is what alive means.

This is what Moshe meant when he said: choose life. This is the prize. This is the destination of the entire journey we have been on together.

And it is precisely this — this life, this connection, this return of the soul to its rightful place — that the second set of guardians was placed to protect.

The *Kruvim*.

That is where we are going next.

## Chapter Twelve — The Guardians at the Gate

We have come a long way. We have identified the first guardian blocking the path to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life — and what it represents: the identification with the body, the ego-mind, the illusion of hand-power that keeps us locked outside of life in its true meaning. And we have spent a chapter understanding what life actually is — the soul's connection to its source, the state of genuine aliveness that Adam inhabited before the fall and that we are working our way back toward.

But there was a second guardian placed at the gate of Eden. And if we want to reach the Tree of Life, we need to understand it.

The Torah tells us: after driving Adam and Eve from the Garden, God placed "*et haKruvim v'et lahat haCherev haMithapechet*" — the *Kruvim* and the flame of the Turning Sword — to guard the way to the *Eitz HaChayyim*. (*Genesis 3:24*) Two guardians. Two barriers standing between us and life.

The *Cherev HaMithapechet* we have dealt with at length. Now: the *Kruvim* — the Cherubim.

What are they?

Let us say it plainly, without softening it or building up to it slowly. The *Kruvim* — in their role as guardians of the gate — are suffering and pain. All of it. Every form that suffering takes in a human life: the illness, the loss, the exhaustion, the setbacks, the limitations, the despair. All of the pain and difficulty that weighs a person down and seems to block them at every turn — that is the *Kruvim* standing between them and the Tree of Life.

And this is immediately apparent to anyone who is deep in it. When a person is overwhelmed with pain — depressed, angry at God, hating life because it is simply too much — how clearly does that suffering block the path. Like the Israelites in Egypt who could not hear Moshe's message of redemption because of "*kotzer ruach v'avodah kashah*" — the constriction of spirit and the crushing labor (*Exodus 6:9*) — the suffering itself becomes the obstacle to receiving what God is trying to give.

And there are more specific ways it blocks. When a person begins to identify with the pain — not just feeling it but being it — they take on the victim mentality. They

become the sufferer. And from that identity, the inner voice — the *Yetzer HaRa* — runs a very specific program: you are a victim, you are excused, everyone owes you and you owe no one, the world is against you, there is no point in trying. These messages keep a person trapped in a dysfunctional inner state that compounds the suffering endlessly. And beneath all of it is the sheer physical exhaustion — the person who has nothing left to give, for whom getting through the day is already everything.

This is the *Kruvim* in executioner mode.

Now let us build the case for why the Torah's word *Kruvim* points to this.

Rashi — the primary classical commentator on the Torah — explains immediately what the *Kruvim* are: *Malachi Chabalah* — destructive angels. These destructive beings are known by many names throughout ancient Hebrew writing. They are called *Ruhot* (spirits), *Mazikim* (harmful forces), *Klipot* (husks — the spiritual shells that contain and suppress divine light), *Shedim* — all describing the same phenomenon: parasitic spiritual and energetic beings that surround a person, cling to them, and cause tremendous suffering. The Talmud contains many sources discussing how these *Mashchisim* — these destructive forces — feed off of human beings.

This concept is not unique to the Jewish tradition. In research into the history of human thought, one finds at least twelve different names across different cultures and civilizations describing the same phenomenon — Archons, Egregors, pendulums, and many more — all pointing to the same understanding: parasitic forces that attach to human beings and make their lives miserable. We do not need other traditions to confirm what our Sages already taught us. But it is striking confirmation that the Torah identified something that human beings across all civilizations have recognized.

Now, we have all heard the teaching: every good deed creates a good angel, and every bad deed creates a bad angel. And from this we sometimes picture these angels sitting somewhere up in heaven, hanging around, waiting — as if there is a nice fluffy angel in the heavenly realm, chatting with other angels, waiting for you to need him. This is not how it works. These beings surround you. They live on you. And they feed off of your energy. They are not remote — they are immediate, present, and personal. They do not wait in heaven. They are with you now.

These two specific *Kruvim* — the guardians of the gate — have names. They are called *Af* (anger) and *Chema* (wrath). And they appear throughout the Midrash in ways that illuminate exactly who and what they are.

When The Israelites sinned with the Golden Calf, five destructive angels descended to destroy the nation. The Midrash lists all five by name: *Ketzef* (Wrath), *Af* (Anger), *Chema* (Rage), *Mashchit* (Destroyer), and *HaShmeid* (Destruction). Moshe invoked the merit of the Patriarchs — Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — and three of the five were annihilated. The last two standing were *Af* and *Chema* — the generals, the most powerful, the most enduring. (*Shemot Rabbah 41:7; Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa*)

It was therefore *Af* and *Chema* who came forward when Moshe ascended to heaven to receive the Torah. And this makes perfect sense. God called the Torah "*Eitz chayyim hi l'machazikim bah*" — a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it. (*Proverbs 3:18*) Just as *Af* and *Chema* were placed to guard the Tree of Life in the garden of Eden, so too they stand guard over the Torah. They are the keepers of life itself.

The angels objected to God giving the Torah to human beings, and *Af* and *Chema* came to challenge Moshe. What followed reveals the full terror of who they are. Moshe turned to God and said: I am afraid of them. They could vaporize me with the words of their mouth. These are not minor spiritual nuisances. Even Moshe — the greatest human being who ever lived — was afraid to confront them directly. And God's response was extraordinary: grab onto My throne and answer them. We will return to what this means.

King David also had a direct encounter with *Af* and *Chema* — and he named them explicitly in the Book of Psalms, chapter 6: "*Al b'apcha tokicheni*" — do not rebuke me in Your anger — *Af* — "*v'al b'chamatcha teyasreni*" — nor chastise me in Your wrath — *Chema* — and the verse continues immediately: be gracious to me, for I am languishing — heal me, O God, for my bones shudder. He encountered *Af* and *Chema* — and was asking God to heal him from the beating they gave him. The *Midrash Tehillim* on this very verse confirms it explicitly: *Af* and *Chema* are *shnei katlanim shel mavet* — the two executioners of death. King David was not merely describing emotional states. He was naming two specific angels — the same two who stand at the gate of Eden.

Now we arrive at the great paradox at the heart of this teaching. And it is a paradox that, when resolved, changes everything.

The same word — *Kruvim* — describes two entirely opposite realities.

In Gan Eden: the *Kruvim* are the destructive guardians who block the path to the *Eitz HaChayyim*. Terrifying. Harmful. Executioners of death.

In the *Mishkan* — the Tabernacle that God commanded Moshe to build in the desert: the *Kruvim* are golden figures crafted and placed atop the *Aron HaKodesh*, the Holy Ark, in the very center of the Holy of Holies — the most sacred place in the world. Sewn into the curtains. Central to the entire architecture. And from between them, God speaks. "*V'dibarta eilecha me'al hakaporet, mibein shnei haKruvim*" — I will speak to you from above the covering, from between the two *Kruvim*, which are upon the Ark of the testimony. (*Exodus 25:22*) And again in Numbers: when Moshe entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with God, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the cover, from between the two *Kruvim*. (*Numbers 7:89*)

Same name. Same beings — as the Zohar teaches (*Parshat Terumah 169b*): when God placed the *Kruvim* at the east of Gan Eden, they were the two pillars of the world — *Chesed* (lovingkindness) and *Din* (judgment). (The same concepts as — *Midat HaRachamim* and *Midat HaDin* — the attribute of mercy and the attribute of judgment.) And when Moshe was commanded to build the Ark, he was specifically told to replicate that exact angelic structure. The connection is not incidental. It is architectural.

And the *Midrash Rabbah* states it directly: when Israel made the *Mishkan*, God said — it is as if I have returned to the Garden of Eden. Just as the Garden had the *Kruvim* to guard the way, the *Mishkan* has the *Kruvim* to be the seat of the *Shekhinah* — and that makes sense since the Torah is the Tree of Life, as it says it is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it. The ones who guarded the Tree of Life in the Garden are the ones guarding the Torah here, which is the Tree of Life. (*Bamidbar Rabbah 13:2*) The Ark is the portal of Eden reopened in the middle of the desert. The *Mishkan* was a *Tikkun* — a repair, a restoration — for the exile from the Garden. The *Kruvim* were never meant to be guards of exile. They were always meant to be the carriers of God's voice.

How do we resolve this?

It is not a paradox at all. It is a dual nature — and the determining factor is entirely which side of the *Cherev HaMithapechet* you are standing on. Which eyes you are seeing through.

From the body's paradigm — the child's paradigm — the rule is simple: what feels good is good, what feels bad is bad. Pain automatically equals bad. And therefore, when suffering arrives, the response is collapse: complaining, despairing, shutting down, feeling abandoned or punished. The *Kruvim* stand against you as destructive forces — because you are approaching the gate from the wrong side.

But from the soul's paradigm — once the *Cherev HaMithapechet* has been turned right-side up, once you have stopped identifying with the hand and begun operating from the perspective of the soul — the very same suffering that previously kept you down becomes something entirely different. It becomes a teacher. A guide. A carrier of *Da'at* — of the deepest knowing. As we established in an earlier chapter, God speaks through the events of our lives. He is communicating with us constantly. And when we receive suffering through the soul's eyes — when we stop seeing "he hurt me, she did this to me" and begin seeing "what is God communicating to me through this?" — the pain becomes the very carrier of *Da'at* itself.

The Sages said: if you have acquired *Da'at* — deep, integrated, soul-rooted knowing — what are you lacking? Nothing. And if you lack *Da'at* — what have you acquired? Nothing. *Da'at* is everything. Its absence leaves a person with nothing of real value regardless of what else they possess.

*Da'at* emerges from pain — and is also paid for and acquired through pain.

The Sages teach that three things are acquired specifically through *Yisurim* — through suffering: Torah — God's wisdom and teaching — *Eretz Yisrael* — the Land of Israel — and *Olam HaBa* — the World to Come. (*Berachot 5a*) Three things that represent the ultimate destination — the *Eitz HaChayyim* itself — all three specifically and necessarily acquired through the path of pain. You cannot acquire them without it.

And the Torah makes it explicit that God's love and suffering are not in opposition — they are inseparable. As the verse says: "*Ki et asher ye'ehav Hashem yochi'ach, u'che'av et-ben yirtzeh*" — for whom God loves He rebukes, as a father who desires his son. (*Proverbs 3:12*) And the Talmud sharpens this further: "*Kol she'HaKadosh Baruch Hu chafetz bo, medak'o b'yisurin*" — whoever the Holy One Blessed be He cherishes, He crushes with suffering. (*Berachot 5a*) The suffering is not incidental to the love. It flows from it. And King David — who knew both more intimately than almost any human being who ever lived — testified to this directly:

And the Psalms echo this as well: "*Rabot ra'ot tzaddik, umikullam yatzilenu Hashem*" — many are the afflictions of the righteous, and from all of them God will save him. (*Psalms 34:20*) And: "*Tov li ki uneti — l'ma'an elmed chukecha*" — it is good for me that I was afflicted — so that I might learn Your statutes. (*Psalms 119:71*)

Which statutes is King David referring to? The morning prayers give us the answer directly. In the *Ahavas Olam* — the blessing of deep love recited every morning

immediately before the *Shema* — we say: "*V'telamideim chukei chayyim*" — and You have taught them the statutes of life. The very same word: *chukim*, statutes. When King David said he was afflicted in order to learn God's statutes, he was speaking of these — the *chukei chayyim*, the laws of life itself. The rules for how to come alive — not merely to exist. And this brings us right back to the question we asked in the previous chapter: what is life, and what does it mean to choose it? The affliction, King David is telling us, is what teaches us the answer. You cannot learn the statutes of life from a comfortable distance. You learn them from inside the fire.

And this point is demonstrated in another verse. The Torah commands: "*U'shmartem et-chukotai v'et-mishpatai asher ya'aseh otam ha'adam v'chai ba'hem, Ani Hashem*" — you shall keep My statutes and My ordinances, which a person shall do and live by them; I am God. (*Leviticus 18:5*) Rashi, commenting on these words, notes that "and live by them" does not refer to life of the body in this world — it refers to the infinite life of the soul. In other words, God's statutes are there precisely so that we may live by them — to come alive in the deepest sense, to reach the genuine life of the soul that is the destination of this entire journey.

Now this is a hard teaching to hear — especially from inside the pain. So let us say it clearly and then build the case for it.

No bad comes from God. It is the sin of all sins — pride, the ego, the hand — that drives God away. And the suffering itself, understood correctly, is not bad at all.

God designed this physical world — this world of matter and time and limitation — with the specific capacity for pain, lack, loss, and suffering. This is one of the primary functions of the physical realm, alongside falsehood. Consider the very name: the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil — "*Eitz haDa'at tov va'ra*" — good and evil. (*Genesis 2:9*) The word *ra* is usually translated as evil — but in Hebrew *ra* also means bad, suffering, the bitter and painful experience of lack. And in the context of the Tree of Knowledge, this is its primary meaning: the knowledge of pain and suffering, not merely of moral evil.

Consider this. If you were placed directly into the greatest goodness — with no context, no contrast, no experience of its absence — you would barely notice it. It would be like the air we breathe: sustaining everything, noticed by almost no one, because we have never known its absence. By experiencing this bitter world — by being saturated to the maximum with bitterness and difficulty — when the *Geulah* arrives, when the goodness comes in its fullness, you have context. You have perspective. You have the

capacity to receive it with a depth of appreciation that only those who have genuinely suffered can have.

And therefore — the suffering is an inseparable part of the good. Not a detour around it. Not a tax on it. An inseparable part of the very light and goodness God wants to give us, without which that goodness cannot be fully received or fully valued.

And this illuminates something about the Tree of Knowledge itself. Its name is not merely the Tree of Knowledge — it is the Tree of Knowledge of Good *and Evil*. One cannot truly know the good until one has experienced the bad. Adam and Eve were born into the Garden — arguably the greatest good any human being has ever encountered. And yet they did not yet *know* good. How could they? They had never experienced its absence. They had never tasted darkness. The contrast that gives goodness its full depth, its full flavor, its full meaning — had not yet been felt. The eating from the tree was, in one sense, the necessary entry into the full spectrum of experience through which genuine *Da'at* — the deep knowing of good — eventually becomes possible.

This was not an accident that befell us. Before we descended into this world, we understood what was coming. We knew it would be hard. We accepted it — because from the vantage point of above, we could see clearly that it was for our good. Only once we descended and forgot — only once we were inside the experience — did it begin to feel like abandonment, like punishment, like injustice.

But the acceptance was real. And the reason for it was real.

In addition to contrast, suffering is our greatest teacher and forger. The depth of character that comes from a person who has been through the fires of hell — who has passed through those experiences and come out transformed on the other side — is qualitatively incomparable to the depth of someone who has lived comfortably. As the prophet says: "*V'heveti et hashlishit ba'esh — u'tzrafti otam k'tzrof et hakesef, u'vachtim ka'asher yivachan et hazahav*" — I will bring the third part through the fire — and I will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. (*Zechariah 13:9*) God is forging us. Through all of this exile, through all of this suffering, He has been building us into something we could not become any other way.

We are not the unlucky ones. We are the ones being forged.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught: "*Keshe'adam yodea shekol me'ora'otav hem l'tovato — zot habechina hi me'ein Olam HaBa*" — when a person knows that all his

experiences are for his benefit — this concept is itself an aspect/a taste of the World to Come. (*Likutey Moharan 4:1*)

There is a related teaching in the Talmud that illuminates this from another angle. Today, when something bad occurs, we recite the blessing *Dayan HaEmet* — the True Judge. When something good occurs, we recite *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* — the One who is good and does good. But the Talmud teaches that in the messianic era, we will recite *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* on both good and bad alike. (*Pesachim 50a*) One might ask: if in the messianic era there will be no bad, what does it mean to say a blessing on the bad? The answer is this: there will indeed be no bad events in that era. But looking back across all of history, we will see with perfect clarity how everything — even what appeared to be darkness and suffering — was in truth for our ultimate good. The blessing of *HaTov v'HaMeitiv* will be recited on the past as well as the present. What Rabbi Nachman calls *Da'at* — the full, soul-rooted knowing that all experiences are for one's good — is the personal, inner arrival at exactly that vision. The one who reaches it does not wait for the messianic era to see it. They taste it now.

When you can begin to reach that place — when you can genuinely receive the suffering as God's communication, sit with it, and begin to ask what it is trying to teach you — something remarkable happens. You begin to transmute it. The very darkness becomes light.

In the introduction to the Zohar (*Volume I, 4a*), the story is told of Rav Chiya, who fasted for eighty days in order to be worthy of ascending to the heavenly academy where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and other righteous souls were gathered. When he arrived at the gate, a voice called out: "*Mi b'chem she'hefach choshech l'or u'mar l'matok kodem she'ba l'kan?*" — who among you has turned darkness into light and bitterness into sweetness before coming here?

That is the entry requirement. Not: were you a good person? Were you a great Torah scholar? The question is whether you completed this specific alchemy — whether you turned your darkness into light and your bitterness into sweetness.

*Af* and *Chema* — they are the darkness and the bitterness. If you try to run from them — if you resist the suffering, reject it, fight against it from the ego's perspective — you stay in exile. You are locked outside the gate.

But if you grasp the throne — if you use that very suffering to relocate your identity from the body to the soul, to receive the pain as God's communication and turn it into

*Da'at* — you have turned the darkness into light. You have tasted the bitterness as sweet. And the gate opens.

## Chapter Thirteen — Grasping the Throne

We have covered a great distance. Let us take a breath and acknowledge where we are.

We started this journey with a simple question: why is it so hard? Why is it so hard to get to healing, to truth, to the inner life that God wants us to live, to get to the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life?

And we found two guardians blocking the path. The first: the *Cherev HaMithapechet* — the Turning Sword — the illusion of the hand, the identification with the body, the ego that insists it is in control. When we are in that state of mind, we give *Midat HaDin* — the attribute of judgment — control over our lives. And when *Midat HaDin* is in control, *Midat HaRachamim* — the attribute of mercy — is not. It is the seesaw again, just like Yaakov and Esau. When one is up, the other is down.

These are not simply two moods or two perspectives on the same reality. They are two entirely different systems of law, each with the capacity to govern your world in a fundamentally different way. When you are living under *Midat HaRachamim* — the attribute of mercy — the operative law is this: God is with you. Everything that comes to you arrives by His word, from His love, directed toward your good. That is the principle running your world. When you are living under *Midat HaDin* — the attribute of judgment — the governing principle is something else entirely: cause and effect. Natural mechanics. A world running on its own logic, responding to action and consequence. Both are always present — as God places both life and good, and death and evil, before us at every moment — but only one governs at a time. Only one is the dominant force. You are either living under the laws that govern *Midat HaRachamim*, or, by default, you are living under the laws of *Midat HaDin*. And which one governs is determined entirely by how you choose to see.

The second guardian: the *Kruvim* — *Af* and *Chema*, anger and wrath — the pain and suffering that weigh us down and seem to block us at every turn.

In the previous chapter we discovered something extraordinary: the same *Kruvim* that stand guard at the gate of Eden are the very angels from between whom God's voice speaks in the *Mishkan*. The guardians of exile and the carriers of *Da'at* — the same beings, the same name, but a dual nature that only resolves when you understand

which side of the *Cherev HaMithapechet* you are standing on. Which eyes you are seeing through.

This chapter is about how you cross that threshold. The ignition. The process. The move.

After the Israelites defeated Amalek in the desert, Moshe said something that has puzzled people for generations: "*Ki yad al kes Yah — milchamah l'Hashem b'Amalek midor dor*" — a hand is on the throne of God, and the war with Amalek continues from generation to generation. (*Exodus 17:16*)

Rashi notes that two words in this verse are written incompletely. The word for throne is written *kes* — missing the *aleph* that completes it to *kisei*. And God's name is written only *Yah* — just the first two letters of the full four-letter name. As long as Amalek exists, as long as that war is still running, both God's throne and God's name are incomplete.

But not merely incomplete — the short form of the name, *Yud-Heh*, represents *Midat HaDin*, the attribute of judgment. While the full name *Yud-Keh-Vav-Keh* represents *Midat HaRachamim*, the attribute of mercy. So as long as the hand is on the throne, we are not only cut off from the fullness of God's presence — we are living specifically under judgment rather than mercy.

Why? Because there is a hand on the throne. Something — or someone — that is not God is sitting in the place of control, or trying to take the controls. And throughout this entire journey we have established what that hand represents: "*V'amarta bilvavecha kochi v'otzem yadi asah li et hachayil hazeh*" — and you will say in your heart: my strength and the power of my hand has accomplished all this for me. (*Deuteronomy 8:17*) The hand is the fallen belief that my power, my effort, my manipulation of outcomes is what runs my life. That is the *Yad* — the hand — on the *Kisei* — the throne — of the heart.

And as long as that hand is there, God's name within us is one of judgment. And the war continues.

Now here is where Amalek enters as an inner force — not merely a historical enemy.

Amalek in *gematria* — the numerical value of the Hebrew letters — equals 240. The same as *Safek* — doubt. Not philosophical doubt, not the careful questioning of a

truth-seeker working through a difficult problem. Something altogether different: baseless, corrosive, irrational doubt that takes something you already know to be true and makes you feel like maybe it isn't. That casts a shadow over what you have seen clearly.

It sounds like this: Does this really work? Is God really there? Does He really love me? Is this suffering really for my good? Maybe I'm just unlucky. Maybe I'm broken. Maybe none of this is real or matters.

Amalek does not usually come to you with a philosophical argument that God does not exist. Their weapon is subtler and more destructive than that. They simply cast doubt. Introduce uncertainty. Cool what was warm. Dim what was bright. And they direct that corrosive doubt specifically at the things that matter most — God's existence, His kindness, His power in the world, and whether the suffering you are going through serves any purpose at all.

Therefore the antidote to Amalek is crystal clear *Da'at*. The seeker needs to continue searching through all of the doubt and uncertainty and never rest until clarity comes. And the war against them is not a historical event. It is the live condition of your inner world right now.

And this is why, when it comes to defeating Amalek, faith alone is not enough. Judaism does not believe in blind faith. *Emunah* — faith — must be followed through and transformed into *Da'at*. It is *Da'at* alone that defeats the darkness. *Emunah* is simply the pathway that leads us there.

Now look at what God told Moshe when *Af* and *Chema* came to block him. God said: grab onto My throne and answer them.

Here is the exact inverse — and it must be seen precisely as an inverse to be understood. On one side: a hand on the throne, the ego sitting in God's place, claiming control. This is *ki yad al kes Yah* — the hand that makes God's name incomplete and brings the war with Amalek. On the other side — Moshe's move: a hand on the throne while God is sitting on it. Not claiming control. Holding onto the recognition that He is in control. The same gesture, the opposite orientation, the opposite outcome.

Only this time it is the exact inverse. The first hand pushes God out — the second holds onto God's presence. The first hand says: I am running this. The second hand says: You are running this, and I am holding onto that truth with everything I have.

This is the repair. When Moshe grabbed the throne, he was not claiming power. He was relocating his identity away from the ego's claim and anchoring it in the recognition that God is sovereign. Even *Af* and *Chema* — even these terrifying fiery angels — are in God's control. They cannot touch us unless He so decrees it. Grasping the throne is the inner act of knowing this — not as an idea, but as a lived, felt, soul-rooted certainty.

When that certainty fills the heart, the throne is complete. God's name is complete. And *Midat HaRachamim* — mercy — becomes the governing force.

The Sages made this explicit in a striking formulation: “*Kol adam she'ein bo de'ah — asur lerachem alav*” — whoever does not have *Da'at*, it is forbidden to have compassion upon him. (*Sanhedrin 92a*) This cannot mean human compassion between people — children have no *Da'at*, and clearly we do not withhold compassion from children. The Sages are pointing to something more precise: the divine attribute of *Rachamim*, mercy from above, does not govern a person who has not developed *Da'at*. Rabbi Elazar traces this to the verse in Isaiah: “For it is a people of no understanding; therefore He that made them will not have compassion on them, and He that formed them will show them no favor.” (*Isaiah 27:11*) The architecture is consistent. You determine which divine attribute governs your life by what you bring to the encounter. *Da'at* opens the channel of mercy. Without it, the channel remains closed — not as punishment, but as a consequence of the inner alignment.

And here something profound must be added — because it answers a question that might arise.

You might think: but what about sin? What about the times I fail, the moments I fall, the impurity that accumulates? Does that drive God away?

The Baal Shem Tov — Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the eighteenth-century master who founded the Chassidic movement — drew our attention to a verse in Leviticus that answers this precisely. The Torah says: “*HaShokhen itam b'toch tum'atam*” — Who dwells with them amidst their impurity. (*Leviticus 16:16*) Even in impurity, God's presence does not abandon us. Even in sin, even in failure, even in the moments we are least worthy — the *Shekhinah*, the divine presence, remains.

Only one thing drives God away. It is the sin of all sins.

It is pride. The ego. The hand claiming the throne.

The Talmud states it with devastating clarity: regarding any person who has arrogance — God says: he and I cannot dwell together in the world. (*Sotah 5a*) And the verse that underlies it: "*Pen yigbah levavecha v'shachachta et Hashem Elokecha*" — lest your heart grows haughty and you forget God. (*Deuteronomy 8:14*) The haughty heart forgets God — not because God has gone anywhere, but because the ego has left no room for Him.

Sin can be forgiven. Impurity can be purified. The *Shekhinah* endures through all of it. But when the ego-hand sits on the throne of the heart — when *kochi v'otzem yadi* — the strength of my hand — is the ruling principle — God's name is incomplete within us and there is no room for His presence. Not because He abandoned us. Because the ego filled the space.

This is why the move — the single move — is to take the hand off the throne. Not to become perfect. Not to achieve sinlessness. Simply to release the ego's claim to control, hold onto the recognition that He is sovereign, and let His presence fill the heart that has now made room for it.

So what determines which face the *Kruvim* show us?

Here is the precise chain. When we believe in hand-power — when we try to handle our suffering from the ego's perspective, when we try to fix the monitor by drawing over it, when we demand results on our own timeline — we become susceptible to Amalek's doubt. Because the moment things do not go as we planned, the ego's claim to control is exposed as hollow. And into that hollow rushes the corrosive doubt: maybe God is not really behind this. Maybe I am just unlucky. We have placed our hand on God's throne. And the moment the ego-hand goes on the throne that way — *Af* and *Chema* shift into executioner mode. The *Kruvim* become guardians again. The gate closes.

But when what dominates the heart is the recognition that God is in control — when Moshe's move is what we are making — the heart itself becomes the throne. Because the heart IS the throne. *Bil'vavi Mishkan evneh* — in my heart I will build Him a Mishkan. *V'shachanti b'tocham* — I will dwell within them. (*Exodus 25:8*) God's real dwelling place is inside the human heart. And when He is dwelling there — when *Yirat Hashem* dominates the inner world — the *Kruvim* show their other face. They become the voice of *Da'at*, the voice of wisdom itself, the Creator's loving guidance emerging from between their wings.

The Rabbis teach this directly: even the *Kruvim* in the Holy of Holies — when Israel turned away from God, the *Kruvim* would face away from each other, as if enemies. But when Israel returned, they faced each other once more, and the voice of God spoke from between them. The very face they show depends entirely on what is happening in the heart of the one who approaches them.

This is why *Yirat Hashem* — the awe of God, the seeing of God as the cause of all causes — is not the destination of a lifetime's work. It is the beginning.

"*Reishit chochmah yirat Hashem*" — the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. (*Psalms 111:10*) And from Proverbs: "*Yirat Hashem reishit Da'at*" — the fear of God is the beginning of deep knowing. (*Proverbs 1:7*) The seeing opens wisdom. And from that wisdom, the *Da'at* — the genuine integrated knowing — becomes possible. And *Da'at*, lived fully, is the alchemy. It is the turning of darkness into light.

The old model told us: *Yirat Hashem* is something you acquire after a lifetime of service — something the very righteous reach in their old age — through tremendous toil and effort. But the understanding we have been building inverts this entirely. *Yirat Hashem* is not the reward at the end. It is the gateway at the beginning. Until you have acquired even the first glimmering of this seeing — until you begin to perceive God as the cause of all causes operating in your life — you have not even begun the path of wisdom. You have not yet crossed the threshold. The *Kruvim* are still in executioner mode.

This is the beginning of the way in. Everything else — all the tools, all the practices, all the inner work — flows from this foundation.

Now here is the Zohar's full picture of what it means to complete the alchemy.

In the introduction to the Zohar (*Volume I, 4a*), Rav Chiya fasted for eighty days in preparation to ascend to the heavenly academy — the *Mesifta d'Rekia* (the Heavenly Academy) — the yeshiva of the firmament, where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and other righteous souls were gathered. After his eighty days, he ascended to the place where they were assembled. And at the gate, a voice called out: "*Mi b'chem she'hefach choshech l'or u'mar l'matok kodem she'ba l'kan?*" — who among you has turned darkness into light and bitterness into sweetness before coming here?

That is the entry requirement. Not: were you righteous? Were you a great scholar? The question is whether you completed this specific alchemy. Did you turn darkness into light? Did you transform the bitterness of your life into sweetness?

*Af* and *Chema* — they are the darkness and the bitterness. If you try to run from them — if you resist the suffering, reject it, fight against it from the ego's perspective — you stay in exile. You are locked outside the gate.

But if you grasp the throne — if you use that very suffering to relocate your identity from the body to the soul, to receive the pain as God's communication and turn it into *Da'at* — you have turned the darkness into light. To the point that you have tasted the bitterness as sweet. And the gate opens.

This is what Rabbi Nachman meant when he taught: “When a person *knows* that all his experiences are for his good — this itself is an aspect, a taste, of the World to Come.” (*Likutey Moharan 4:1*) The word he chose was *yodea* — knows — not merely believes. A person can believe it — hold it as an intellectual concept — without having truly arrived at it. But *Da'at* is something deeper than belief. It is full realization. It is seeing with the soul's eyes. It is the knowing that we have been building toward through this entire journey.

And when a person arrives at that knowing — when it is genuinely *Da'at* and not merely a nice idea they heard — they can do something that seemed impossible before: they can thank God for what seemed terrible.

And thanksgiving is not merely an appropriate response to this understanding. It is the gate itself.

“*Mizmor l'todah — bo'u sh'arav b'todah, chatzerotav bit'hilah*” — a song of thanksgiving — come to His gates with thanksgiving, His courtyards with praise. (*Psalms 100*) The Sages established this Psalm as one of the fixed daily prayers. And the Midrash teaches that in the messianic era, all sacrificial offerings will cease — except for the thanksgiving offering, the *korban todah*. (*Vayikra Rabbah 9:7*) Because in a world of complete truth, goodness and blessing, all other offerings become unnecessary. But thanksgiving — the recognition that everything comes from God — is not an offering brought for a specific need. It is the permanent posture of a soul that sees clearly. It will never become unnecessary. On the plain level, Psalm 100 is a description of how to come to the Temple. But on the deeper level it is saying something precise: if you want to come to the gates of God, you come with thanksgiving. That is what gets you there.

And the verse from *Hallel* makes it even more explicit: “*Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek — avo vam odeh Yah*” — open up for me the gates of righteousness — through them will

come those who thank God. (*Psalms 118:19*) Why does it say open up? Because the gate is closed. We are locked out. How does it open? Those who thank God come through.

And the latter half of the verse: "*Zeh hasha'ar l'Hashem, tzadikim yavo'u vo*" — this is the gate to God; the righteous will enter through it. (*Psalms 118:20*) This is the gate to God. The righteous will come and come.

But — and this is absolutely critical — you cannot perform this thanksgiving. Hearing this teaching and deciding to say thank you as a spiritual technique does not work. You have to come to know it — *Da'at* — in the full sense of that word. To see it through the soul's eyes. To reach the clarity — not just the concept but the actual perception — that everything is His, everything is communication, everything is for your good. To the point that you have tasted the bitterness as sweet. When that clarity is genuine, the gratitude is not performed. It flows. You look at what is happening in your life and you can genuinely say: God, thank You. I see what You are doing here.

And in fact, this is what we meditate on every time we make a *bracha* — a blessing — before eating or drinking. There is one blessing in particular that captures this with complete precision: "*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, shehakol niyeh bidvaro*" — Blessed are You, God, King of the universe, through whose word everything comes into being. Everything. Not just the food in front of you — everything that exists, everything that happens, everything that comes to you. It is all His word made manifest. Every *bracha* is an infusion of this recognition. Even bread: we say "*hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*" — He brings bread from the earth. But He does not literally bake it — we do. The point is that everything we receive — down to the most ordinary sustenance — is because God so decreed it. Every time we say a blessing we are practicing the very perception that is the gateway to God — planting into our food, our drink, our thoughts, our hearts the recognition that it is all His, all from Him, all communication.

When you genuinely see the world this way — when there are no more accidents, no more coincidences, no more bad luck, only the continuous unfolding of God's communication — you can convert that communication into *Da'at* through prayer and the inner work. You come to understand that everything happening is for your good. And then you thank God. And that thanksgiving — genuine, clear-eyed, soul-rooted — is the gate.

And this takes us all the way back to where we began.

"*Re'eh* — *natati lefanecha hayom et haChayyim v'et hatov, v'et hamavet v'et hara* — *u'vacharta baChayyim*" — see, I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil — and you shall choose life. (*Deuteronomy 30:15, 19*)

To choose life — to genuinely make that choice — you have to see and know that it is all good. All of it. No exceptions. When you can see that — when the *Kruvim* have shifted from executioner mode to the voice of *Da'at*, when the darkness has become light and the bitterness has been tasted as sweetness — then you can say yes to life. You can choose it not as an act of will but as a natural response to what you now see clearly.

And the prophet Habakkuk seals it in a single verse: *Ve'tzaddik b'emunato yichyeh* — the righteous shall live by his *emunah*. (*Habakkuk 2:4*) Not by his intellect. Not by the strength of his hand. By his *emunah* — the soul's power of acceptance, redirected toward what is true, toward what is real, toward what God actually is. When *emunah* is fully aligned with truth, that alignment is not merely a path toward life. That alignment is life itself.

And the Sages took this further in a teaching found in Sanhedrin: just as the word *Da'at* is surrounded by God's name before and after it, so too is the *Bet HaMikdash* — the Temple — God's name begins it and ends it. From this the Sages derive: whoever has *Da'at* is as if they rebuilt the *Bet HaMikdash* in their generation. (*Sanhedrin 92a*) We have been saying throughout this book that God's true dwelling place is not a building — it is the human heart. *V'shachanti b'tocham* — within them, not within it. The sanctuary God wants is the one built inside you. And now the Gemara completes the picture: that inner sanctuary is built through *Da'at*. The one who arrives at genuine *Da'at* — who knows, in the full soul-rooted sense of that word, that everything is from God and everything is for good — has built the dwelling place. That person has brought God's presence into the world. Not metaphorically. Literally.

The *Cherev HaMithapechet* and the *Kruvim* together are the keepers of the path to the Tree of Life. They are not obstacles placed there to frustrate you. They are the doorway itself — the guardian architecture of a path that can only be walked in a specific way, from a specific inner place, through a specific kind of seeing.

Now you know the way.

But there is one more thing that needs to be said — because you may be wondering: is all of this just a way of making peace with the suffering? A reframe that leaves me in the same misery but now with a better attitude about it?

The answer is unequivocally no. Nothing could be further from the truth.

This process is not about reframing. It is about actually getting out. Pain is exile. The messianic era — *Geulah*, redemption — is the state in which all pain and suffering actually ends. Not seen more nicely. Ends. We enter the age of blessing and goodness. And this personal *Geulah* — this exit from pain at the individual level — can happen even before the general worldwide redemption takes place. In fact, the worldwide redemption will only take place when enough individuals have undergone this process and have awakened.

Remember what we established: pain began with the eating of the *Eitz HaDa'at* — the Tree of Knowledge. What Adam and Eve fell from was not merely a garden. It was true *Da'at* — the true understanding of who they were as the soul and how God runs the world. And what they fell into — what the word *ra* in "*tov va'ra*" — good and evil — actually means in this context — is pain and suffering. How do we know? The evidence is immediate: as soon as they ate, the punishments God gave were all expressed in the language of suffering. To Adam: "*b'ze'at apecha tochal lechem*" — by the sweat of your brow you shall eat. (*Genesis 3:19*) Toil. Labor. Hard work just for sustenance. To Eve: "*b'etzev teldi vanim*" — in pain you shall give birth. (*Genesis 3:16*) To the earth itself: "*v'kotz v'dardar tatzmiyach lach*" — thorns and weeds shall grow for you. (*Genesis 3:18*) What are thorns and weeds? They produce nothing of value. They serve no purpose except to cause pain and misery. So what it's saying is — the world itself became a source of pain. That is what the eating of the *Eitz HaDa'at* brought: the knowledge of *ra* — of pain and suffering — entering the world as a lived reality. Hence another reason it is called the Tree of *Da'at*. Since it brings suffering, we now have the Currency that we need to acquire that *Da'at*.

And the *Eitz HaChayyim* — the Tree of Life — is the way back out.

With every step you take out of the *Eitz HaDa'at* state of mind — out of the ego's paradigm, out of body-identification, out of the illusion of hand-power — and toward the *Eitz HaChayyim* consciousness of the soul, you walk further and further from the state of pain. Because pain is only needed as long as we are not learning the lessons it was sent to teach. The moment you extract the wisdom, the truth, the *Da'at* from the suffering — the moment the message has been received — the pain is no longer needed. It crumbles. It falls away. It is no longer required.

And what replaces it? A life of love, gratitude, joy, and peace. These are not spiritual aspirations — they are the actual states of a soul that is living from its true nature.

Like a doctor who must first diagnose a condition before prescribing treatment — we had to understand what suffering is, why it is there, and how it works, before we could address it properly. Now we understand it. And the prescription is this: trust God so much that you can thank Him for it. Say — God, I trust You. I do not understand everything. But because this is coming from You, I accept it. And in that acceptance, you transmute it. You convert it into the message, you receive what you need from it, and then it is no longer needed.

And if you find yourself asking — where does such a level of trust come from? The answer is *Da'at*. Only genuine *Da'at* can produce trust of this depth.

That acceptance — that trust, that grasping of the throne — is the beginning of the actual way out of pain.

The *Cherev HaMithapechet* and the *Kruvim*. The guardians of exile and the carriers of *Da'at*. The same two forces that blocked us, when understood and approached correctly, become the very doorway to the Tree of Life.

That is what was placed to guard the way to the *Eitz HaChayyim*. Not as punishment. As protection. As the precise architecture of a path that only opens from the inside — from the soul's perspective, through the eyes of *Yirat Hashem*, with the hand released from the throne and God's presence filling the heart that has now made room for it.

Grasp the throne.

The gate is open.

Remember this: the journey is a grand treasure hunt. There are challenges. There are difficulties. There is darkness along the way. But with each new-found truth — with each piece of *Da'at* that you uncover — you are one step closer to the treasure itself. Life. Now you understand why His ways are pleasant. Now you understand what it means when the Torah says the path is very close to you — in your mouth and in your heart. The work is always here, always available, always within reach. But fail to take on the journey and remain in the ego's paradigm — and death, in all its forms, awaits. That is the choice God placed before us. And that is your free will.

# Epilogue

If you have reached this page, I want you to sit with what just happened. Most people go through an entire lifetime without encountering what you have just encountered. The map you are now holding — this blueprint for transmuting darkness into light — has been hidden in plain sight inside the Torah for thousands of years. You now have it in your hands. That is not a small thing.

It is the first step out of bondage and toward freedom. But it is only a first step.

And the road ahead — I want to be honest with you — is not one that most people complete alone. This is not a criticism. It is simply how the system works. The Talmud says it plainly: a prisoner cannot free himself from his own prison. We need guides who have covered ground we haven't yet reached. We need companions who are walking alongside us. We need the next layer of the map — because what this book contains, as much as it is, is the beginning of a much larger picture. The books that follow go deeper. The conversations that await go further. The path is real. But it was never meant to be walked in isolation.

This book is a doorway. Not the destination.

What lies beyond it is a path — and paths are not walked by reading about them once. They are walked step by step, over time, with repetition, with companions, and ideally with someone who has already covered some of the ground.

I say this from experience. The ideas in this book are not ideas you absorb once and carry forward. They are ideas you need to sit with, return to, discuss, wrestle with, and allow to work on you over time. Read this book again. Then read it with someone else. Talk about what it is saying. Let the pieces find each other at their own pace. The map has layers that only reveal themselves on the second and third reading — and layers that only become visible in conversation with other people walking the same road.

And if you genuinely want to walk this path — not just understand it intellectually but actually transmute your darkness into light — then I want to invite you to do it with me.

Over twenty years of walking this road have given me something I did not have when I started: the ability to see where others are on the path, to answer the questions

that arise, and to help people move through the places where the road becomes unclear. I am building a community of people who are serious about this journey — not a group of people who found a book interesting, but a group of people who are ready to walk it. Together.

Our community space is open to everyone at no cost. Connect with fellow seekers, discuss the concepts, strengthen each other along the way — the road is walked better together than alone.

For those who wish to go deeper — to receive the bonus chapter, join our private guided conversations, and be part of the upcoming books — there is a path for that too. You will find it waiting for you when you arrive.

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And for those for whom this message did not land — if you closed this book feeling that not much reached you — I want to say this directly: sometimes, with ideas this different from everything we have been taught, the light does not go on at the first reading. Or the second. Before you set it aside, consider returning to it. And if it is simply not for you — if it does not speak to where you are — then I wish you all the best in the world on the remainder of your journey. I mean that genuinely.

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## A Note on Hebrew Terms

The following terms appear throughout this book. Each is translated and explained when first introduced, but this glossary is here for easy reference whenever you need a quick reminder.

**Af** — Anger. One of the two destructive angels named in the Midrash as guardians of the path back to the Tree of Life.

**Aron HaKodesh** — The Holy Ark. The sacred vessel at the center of the Tabernacle, above which the voice of God spoke from between the wings of the Cherubim.

**Bitachon** — Trust in action. Where Emunah is the inner conviction, Bitachon is what that conviction looks like when it is lived.

**Chevlei Moshiach** — Literally, the birth contractions of the Messiah. The period of intensified suffering that precedes the Messianic era — compared by the Sages to the labor pains that precede a birth.

**Cherev HaMithapechet** — The Turning Sword. The great inversion — the confusion of inside and outside, soul and body, cause and effect — that blocks the path back to the Tree of Life.

**Chema** — Wrath. One of the two destructive angels named in the Midrash as guardians of the path back to the Tree of Life.

**Da'at** — Deep, embodied knowing. Not knowledge accumulated from books, but the integrated understanding that comes from lived experience, genuine encounter with truth, and the transformation that suffering and growth produce.

**Eitz HaChayyim** — The Tree of Life. The state of consciousness and connection that is the destination of the soul's journey — accessible when the soul reclaims its rightful place as the center of identity.

**Eitz HaDa'at** — The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The tree from which Adam and Eve ate in the Garden of Eden, introducing the experience of suffering and duality into human consciousness.

**Emunah** — The soul's faculty of acceptance. The power to hold something as genuinely true. Often translated as faith, but that translation does not capture its full meaning — Emunah is not a feeling, it is a faculty, and it operates whether it is pointed at truth or at falsehood.

**Emet** — Truth. What is actually real.

**Erech Apayim** — Literally, the lengthening of the nostrils. Patience. The divine attribute of infinite forbearance — the capacity to hold space for what has not yet arrived. The counterpart of Kotzer Ruach.

**Galut** — Exile. The state of disconnection, constriction, and suffering — whether experienced as a nation in exile or as an individual cut off from their deepest self.

**Geulah** — Redemption. Liberation from exile — personal and collective. The destination of the soul's journey.

**Guf** — Body. The physical vessel through which the soul navigates this world.

**Hamtein** — Waiting. Not passive resignation, but the active, faithful surrender of the timeline to God. The Sages identify it as the seal of the side of holiness.

**Kedushah** — Holiness. Spiritual health. The state of genuine aliveness in which the soul is operating from its true nature.

**Kisei** — Throne. Used throughout this book in the phrase “the throne of the heart” — the seat of authority within the inner world, which is either occupied by the ego or returned to God.

**Kochi v'otzem yadi** — “The strength of my hand.” The belief — identified by the Torah as the heart of spiritual error — that human effort and control are the source of outcomes.

**Kotzer ruach** — Constriction of spirit. Literally, shortness of breath. The inner state of exile — contracted, suffocated, unable to receive what is being offered.

**Kruvim** — The Cherubim. The guardian angels placed at the gate of the Garden of Eden — and the same golden figures placed atop the Ark in the Tabernacle, from between whose wings God's voice speaks.

**La'at la'at** — Gradually. Step by step. The pace of real inner change.

**Midat HaDin** — The attribute of judgment. The governing principle in which the world operates according to natural law, cause and effect, action and consequence.

**Midat HaRachamim** — The attribute of mercy. The governing principle in which God's love and communication flow through all events, and everything that comes to you is directed toward your good.

**Mishkan** — The Tabernacle. The portable sanctuary the Jewish people built in the desert — a repair for the exile from the Garden of Eden.

**Mitzrayim** — Egypt. From the Hebrew root metzarim — constriction. The archetype of inner exile.

**Nachash Hakadmon** — The primordial serpent of the Garden of Eden. Not a physical snake but the force of falsehood — the source of the foundational lies that distorted human consciousness.

**Nefesh** — The soul's operational layer: the level where beliefs, habits, and inner programming live. The layer where the patterns that govern emotional and physical experience are held.

**Neshamah** — Soul. The divine essence within each person — what we truly are beneath the body, the ego, and the accumulated conditioning.

**Sitra Achra** — The other side. The forces of falsehood and darkness — the realm that is sustained by the beliefs that oppose truth.

**Simcha** — Joy. Not manufactured happiness, but the natural state of a soul that is aligned with truth. Rabbi Nachman called it the measuring rod of holiness.

**Tahara** — Purity. The process of separation — of pulling apart what has been falsely merged, restoring clarity of identity between soul and ego.

**Yetzer HaRa** — The inner adversary. The voice of self-destruction that passes itself off as your own thoughts. Its power lies entirely in being mistaken for you.

**Yeridas HaDoros** — The descent of the generations. Each generation falling to a lower spiritual level than the one before — understood in this book not as punishment but as mercy, making it increasingly clear that we cannot do this alone.

**Yirat Hashem** — The awe of God. The specific perception that God is the sole cause of all causes — that nothing has independent power over you. When this seeing opens, fear of everything else automatically dissolves.

**Zuhama shel nachash** — The toxin of the serpent. The foundational false beliefs planted into human consciousness at the time of the sin — the lies about God, about self, and about reality from which all destructive patterns descend.