

Sparks

by Rabbi David Aaron
*Founder and Dean, Isralight
Rosh Yeshiva, Orayta*

Bonding or Bondage Why Serve the Divine?

“For unto Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants who I took out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord G-d.” ~ Leviticus 25:55

There is an Eastern teaching that proclaims, “Be here and now.” Torah however would say, “Serve G-d here and now.” Indeed, this is the fullest experience of life.

The Kabbalah teaches that G-d wants to be present in the here and now, and our job is to serve G-d in that desire. Therefore, to serve G-d means to infuse each moment with the presence of G-d. In other words, I must always ask myself, “How can I serve G-d right now?”

If right now I am with my friend, spouse or child, I should see this moment as an opportunity to show him/her love and thus serve G-d, who is the source of all love. It’s not my love. I didn’t invent love. I didn’t create love and I didn’t give it its’ power and meaning. Love did not start with me and love will not end with me. I am not the master of love but I am the servant of love and when I love someone I am serving to make G-d’s love present in the here and now.

My service to G-d (who wants to be present in this world in the here and the now) is to channel His love, compassion, justice, wisdom or whatever divine value the moment calls for—present in this moment. That is fully living. The goal of life is to serve G-d here and now, to be present in this moment.

Torah teaches that there is no greater joy in life than to serve G-d. G-d wants to be present in this world through you and me. To live G-d’s purpose is to serve. This is our ultimate reward, accomplishment and ecstasy. This is the meaning of our existence on earth and this is the key to happiness.

Surrender and Serenity

G-d conscious people are not self-consciousness. They are completely absorbed in the moment in their service to G-d; they become one with G-d and feel ecstasy.

If you are playing Frisbee and you ask yourself, “Am I having fun?” then you are definitely not having fun because it means that you are not fully absorbed in the moment. If you are sitting by the sea, listening to the enchanting sound of the waves, and you ask yourself, “Am I experiencing serenity and inner peace now?” then you are definitely not because you are not fully present. You could not be fully there if you could ask the question.

The highest expression of pleasure is what is described in Jewish mysticism as *Betul HaYesh*—the negation of being self-consciousness. If I am self-conscious, then I am not completely absorbed in the service of the moment. When you are reading a good book, are you aware that you are reading a good book? No, you are just reading a good book. And when you are praying, how do you know that you are praying well? When you simply can’t ask yourself the question, “Am I praying well?”

A story about a young yeshiva student illustrates this point well. The youngster used to pray with so much enthusiasm that he would stomp his feet without realizing it. Normally, this would pose no

problem. But the boy had a lame foot. One day, his rabbi's wife said to her husband, "Please tell the youngster not to stomp his lame foot because he could really aggravate his malady."

The rabbi said to her, "If I thought he knew which foot he was stomping, I would tell him. But he's in such a state of ecstasy, so completely absorbed in his prayers and service, that he doesn't even know he's stomping on his bad foot."

To Serve with Joy

People think that serving G-d is demeaning; servitude implies a slave-master relationship. But that is not the real meaning of serving G-d. The opportunity to serve G-d is the greatest gift we could ever imagine. It's empowering. To serve G-d means that we can do something on behalf of G-d. It's an unbelievable honor!

The Talmud teaches that if you come close to fire, you will be warm, and that the servant who comes close to the king partakes in royalty.

I've been at the home of some very, very wealthy people. I always find it so interesting that the various workers in the home—gardeners, caterers, hairdressers, and so on—live in the mansion with their boss, eat the same food, and enjoy the use of the same facilities like the pool, sauna, and Jacuzzi during their breaks.

The servants in the palace in many ways enjoy the life of royalty. And they are privy to seeing the king in private moments. They even see the king in his pajamas. They come the closest and thereby enjoy the most intimate encounters with the king.

Working for G-d is not a diminishing experience. On the contrary, it's the greatest elevation of status. If I build my business for my own sake, to make money for me, it is really nothing special. But if I build my business for G-d's sake, if I look at what I do and ask myself how can I promote G-d's purpose in this world—how can I bring more love, peace, kindness, justice, and wisdom into the world, how can I be an instrument serving to reveal divine qualities and ideals in the world—it's an unbelievable opportunity! This is the secret to a profoundly meaningful and fulfilling life.

There's a striking line in a song by Bob Dylan: "You're gonna have to serve somebody." Everybody's serving somebody. There's nobody in this world that isn't serving something or somebody else. The question is not "To serve or not to serve?" The question is "*Whom* to serve?"

If my life is dedicated to gaining approval from certain people, then I am always less than they are. But if my life is dedicated to G-d, then the sky's the limit to my self-worth. There is no greater mission waiting for me. There is nothing higher.

Our purpose on earth is not about making a lot of money. If it is, then the T-shirt slogan is right: "The one who dies with the most toys wins." But Kabbalah teaches that we have come to this world to perform the ultimate service—a mission that elevates and brings sacredness to all of life.

Life without a service of a higher purpose is no life at all. A person who wakes up in the morning and has nothing sacred to do will wonder after a while, "Do I really make a difference? Does my life really matter?"

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Living A Joyous Life, The G-d-Powered Life, and Tefillah Training