

Sparks

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

Making G-d's Will Ours

"Behold you have sinned against G-d. And your sin will find you." ~ Numbers 32:23

THE PROCESS OF 'I'-IDENTIFYING

If G-d were the sun each of us would be a ray of His divine light. The goal of the spiritual disciplines of daily Torah (Bible) life - study, prayer, meditation, and the performance of *mitzvas* (religious duties; plural for *mitzvah*), is to serve G-d and, thereby, become one with our true essence. Through these practices we experience our self an aspect and individualized expression of the Timeless Universal Self - G-d.

The 20th century Kabbalist **Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan** explains in his book *Inner Space* that in order to feel this powerful truth, we must learn to disengage our inner self from its outer trappings. In other words, we have to get in touch with our soul as distinct from our persona, thoughts and feelings.

The goal of disengaging the self from the outer trappings is to realize that you are not your thoughts, your emotions, your body, your money, your career or your property. These things are part of your outer persona, but they are not the inner you. You would still be you if you lost any of these things. Many people fear, however, that if they were stripped of these externals, then they would end up feeling like nothing.

There is a powerful scene in **Viktor Frankl's** *Man's Search for Meaning* where the author describes how the Nazis would line up the Jews to select who would go to the gas chambers and who would go to the work camps. A Nazi commander would stand at the front of the line, holding up his hand by the elbow, and with one finger, he would simply point left, right, left, right. One man's little finger determined whether a person would live or die.

Frankl was sent into a room with others, where they were ordered, "strip, take everything off and throw it into a pile in the center of the room within two minutes!" The Jewish prisoners frantically undressed and threw their clothes in the central pile, fearful of running out of time and being killed. At the end, all they were left with was their naked existence.

Frankl, however, stood still holding his manuscripts, which contained a lifetime of research. That little cache held everything that he had ever accomplished in his psychological research. Holding his life's work, he approached the German officer and tried to explain that his possession was worth nothing to the Nazis. At first, the officer seemed to listen compassionately, but then yelled, "Throw it into the pile!" Frankl frantically persisted, "You don't understand. This is my life's work! It's just meaningless paper to you." But the Nazi just repeated, "Throw it into the pile!" Frankl obeyed the order. He, too, was left with only his naked existence. All he was is that *he was*.

Imagine the tragedy of his loss. But also imagine the potential spiritual growth that was available to those who went through such a challenge. Sometimes, very painful experiences offer us tremendous spiritual elevation. Frankl addresses this concept in his book, relating how many people in the

concentration camps became remarkably spiritual. Those who were more religious and spiritually oriented, Frankl explains, lasted longer than those who had big physiques but lacked inner strength.

Frankl writes that after everyone had stripped the Nazis gave out concentration camp uniforms, which were previously worn by someone who had just died in a gas chamber. As Frankl put on the torn, dirty prison uniform, he reached into the pocket and found a tiny piece of paper. He took it out and saw that it was "the *Shema*," the Jews' daily declaration that G-d is the absolutely one and only reality. This little piece of a prayer book that another Jew had managed to keep was Frankl's exchange for his collection of manuscripts. Frankl realized that when he gave up his life's work, he got the *Shema*.

To me this means that when Frankl was stripped of his persona and left to confront his naked soul he was empowered to discover his true identity - identification with the source of all self worth - the one and only everlasting G-d. And that connection no one can take away from you.

LIBERATING THE "I" FROM EXILE

Who are we, after all? Are we our work, or are we eternal souls? If we fear that we become nothing if we let go of our persona, then we are in a state of spiritual exile. If we have always defined ourselves in terms of our career, property, social status and what others think of us, then we are not our own person. Our soul is then in exile. We are trapped in our thoughts, our feelings, our body, our money, our social status, and everything else that makes up our transient character. The soul is lost in the ego and we will feel estranged to our true selves eternally connected to G-d.

The goal of Judaism - whether it be Torah learning, meditation, prayer, or living the *mitzvas* - is to release the soul from its exile -to empower us to free ourselves from the chains that bind us to transience and mortality. We need to reclaim our self -our individual "I" and redirect it to its source, the "Ultimate I." When we do this, we experience the mystical meaning of the first commandment heard at Mt. Sinai 3,500 years ago: "I am" *is* G-d your Lord, who took you out of Egypt." This is the true path to personal empowerment, spiritual liberation, inner peace and fulfillment.

ANCHORED AND CENTERED IN G-D

Judaism refers to G-d as the "Rock of our Lives." In other words, we are truly strong and stable only when we anchor and ground ourselves within G-d - who is the bedrock of all consciousness. Judaism also teaches us that we are each created in the image of the divine and that our goal is service. In other words, that each and every one of us is an individualized expression of G-d and serve as unique channels for His presence into this world. This is our purpose and our ultimate joy.

We naturally want to experience the truth of who we. We seek a connection to a greater whole because we are connected to a greater whole. The spiritual disciplines of a commandment-driven life enable us to consciously center and anchor our self in G-d and live in service. They empower us to disengage from the outer trappings of our persona and feel at one with G-d through the joy of service.

COMMANDMENTS - THE ETERNAL AND INTERNAL REWARD

When the Jewish people received the commandments from G-d at Mt. Sinai they understood the difference between freedom *from* oppression and freedom to expression. When they left Egypt the Jewish people were only freed *from* Egyptian slavery but only when they accepted the commandments were free to be themselves - individualized manifestations of G-d; serving as channels for the flow of divine presence into the world. A Torah life is all about freedom and self-actualization. It is not about changing who you are but being who you.

Even when you are freed from your disorders or addictions you are still not yet free to be the total you. To be all that you can be you need to know who you really are, who is your eternal root, what is your divine purpose and service on earth.

Living the *mitzvas* empowers you to connect with G-d and be your true godly self. At first you may feel that obedience to G-d and the disciplinary life of *mitzvas* is submissive and restrictive. Ironically, however, submission and obedience to G-d becomes a source of empowerment and freedom. Through the *mitzvas* you can experience G-d as the essential power within you; seeking to become expressed through you. At this point, you no longer experience the commandments as acts of obedience, but rather as the free expression of your true inner divine self as an aspect of G-d.

In other words, after we make G-d's will our will and obey, we ultimately realize that His will is actually what we, in our deepest of depths, truly wanted all along, because our will is an expression and ray of His will. We, in essence, are individualized manifestations of the Soul of all souls.

The Kabbalah teaches that when we do not live the *mitzvas* we are as if cutting the ground from beneath our feet, cutting our self out of the bigger picture. Our life becomes one big rip off when we rip ourselves away from G-d. We suffer a self-imposed spiritual exile. However, living a life of service is a homecoming and reunion with G-d. We feel plugged into the Source of all life and energized in every way.

Unfortunately, many people think "serving G-d" is submitting to an egomaniacal deity who dwells in heaven and demands, "You must serve me! Obey my commandments and do them with a smile! Or else I will punish you." In actuality, to serve G-d means to experience complete connection to the source of all life and channel divine presence into the world. Serving G-d is like the dance serving the dancer, the song serving the singer, the speech serving the speaker.

Fulfilling the commandments - *mitzvas* - is not about collecting merit points to be cashed in after we die, an understanding like that may have worked for us when we were five years old (how else could our parents and teachers have explained it to us?). However, as adults we need to understand that commandments profoundly transform our life experience --empowering us to feel plugged into the source of all life, awareness, freedom and creativity. Many people resist a lifestyle dedicated to serving G-d only because they don't understand that G-d is the source of all being, all energy, all values and ideals.

To serve G-d means to embody and channel into the world G-d's love, wisdom, understanding, kindness, justice, compassion, beauty, truth, peace, etc. When you act mercifully, you are serving to make manifest the source of all mercy. When you act intelligently, you are serving to make manifest the source of all intelligence. And when you serve justice, you are serving to make manifest the source of all justice. You experience the joy of ultimate meaning when you make your life a means to an end greater than yourself. But when you make your life the be all and end all then that is the end of your life.

The *mitzvas* are not simply ways to earn reward and avoid punishment. Rather, they express our true divine essence - who we really are and who we are part of - in the language of human behavior.

When we behave in disaccord with the *mitzvas*, we block out G-d's presence from our world. Conversely, when we behave in a way that expresses G-d, we become a channel for G-d's presence and fill the world with blessing.

When we betray G-d, we are ultimately betraying ourselves. It is for this reason that when Adam sinned, he and Eve ran and hid behind a bush. As the Torah relates, G-d called out to Adam and said, "Where

are you?" The question was rhetorical. What G-d was really saying to Adam and Eve was, "Where are *you*? You betrayed yourself."

Our wrong doings are self-betrayals. They not only fail to manifest G-d in the world, but they also prevent us from expressing and experiencing who we really are. All wrong doing is based on being someone we're not, whether we know it or not. We will not be punished for our sin but by our sins. Nor will we be rewarded for our service but by our service. Being who we are; experiencing our connection to G-d is paradise itself.

Rabbi David Aaron

Author of Endless Light, Seeing G-d, The Secret Life of G-d, Inviting G-d In, Love is My Religion, Soul Powered Prayer, Living A Joyous Life, and The G-d-Powered Life

For more on this topic see [The Secret Life of G-d: discovering the divine within you](#)