

# Sparks

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## **Are You Ready for the Ultimate Pleasure?**

The generations following the sin of Adam and Eve proceeded upon a path of moral degeneration. Cain, in a jealous rage, impulsively killed his brother Abel. In the next generation, Tuvel- Kain perfected the crime of Cain through manufacturing weapons. Then, Lemach boasted to his wives of committing pre-meditative murder. Idolatry flourished during the time of Enosh. Organized crime was established by a group of hoodlums called “The sons of Elohim.” Sexual perversion was rampant in Noah’s generation.

Torah tradition teaches that there are three cardinal sins that a person should choose death rather than be forced to commit. They are: murder, idolatry, and sexual perversion. These offenses are the ultimate denial of G-d’s love and the values that make life worth living. They are a complete violation of living within the context of G- d’s oneness and love and therefore cut humanity off from the source and ground of life. In a span of just ten generations, humanity transgressed all three cardinal sins. This deterioration meant the destruction of the world. G-d decreed the Flood. “And G-d was saddened in His heart.” What does this mean?

The Kabbalah teaches that G-d wants to give us the greatest pleasure— His presence in our lives; to feel connected to Him. We are therefore, commanded, “To love the Lord your G-d, listen to His voice and bond to Him because He is your life (Deuteronomy 30:20).” In other words, you should love G-d because “G-d is your life”: the very life force within every fiber of your being. Loving G-d is, therefore, synonymous with loving life. The Torah teaches, “You who are bonded with the Lord, your G- d, are alive, totally, today” (Deuteronomy, 4:4). The more connected we feel to G-d the more alive we feel. How can we know if we are truly bonding with G- d? It’s when we feel totally alive; when our entire being is filled with a phenomenal vitality that we know we cannot honestly call our own or refer to as *my* life.

We feel G-d’s presence when we realize that our willpower, wisdom, insights and love are really not ours but His and experience ourselves as merely serving to channel His powers into the world. In this state of connectivity we feel the joy of purposeful and meaningful living. We also experience G-d’s presence when we encounter His mastery in the wonders of nature and see everything as a divine masterpiece—a piece of the master. (For more on experiencing G-d’s presence, read my book *Seeing G-d*).

However, G-d cannot give us this great gift of His presence, unless we want Him in our lives. We must first know in our hearts that G-d’s presence is, indeed, the greatest gift we could ever hope to receive; that it is pure ecstasy. We give G-d pleasure, so to speak when we want to receive what He wants to give us.

Our problem is that we often get distracted from what’s eternally real and pleasurable and pursue temporal things. Not only does this not give G-d pleasure, it causes Him, so to speak, much pain.

Just before the generation of the flood G-d was “saddened in His heart.” The commentator Sforno explains that G-d is sad when we are not ready or interested in receiving the goodness He wants to give us. G-d wants to give us a connection to Him and shower us with His loving presence. But we do not want it. Instead, we want money, property, clothing, sex, fame and power. This is similar to the sadness and pain a nursing mother feels when her baby does not want to suck. As the saying goes, “More than the baby wants to suck, the mother wants to nurse.” When a baby does not want to nurse from its mother, the mother experiences intense emotional and physical pain.

A story is told about a Rebbe who hires a horseman to take him to a *shtetl*. On the way, they hit a storm. Shabbos is quickly approaching, so the Rebbe says to the horseman, “Please, I will give you a big portion in the World to Come if you get me to the *shtetl* on time.”

The horseman agrees and drives his horse very hard. Unfortunately, the horse falls ill and dies. The horseman is so devastated by the death of his horse that he also dies. In heaven, G-d fulfills the Rebbe’s decree and gives the horseman a huge portion in the World to Come. But the horseman is depressed; he misses his horse. G-d wants to give him the ultimate pleasure of closeness to Him in the World to Come, but the horseman only wants his horse. G-d sadly fulfills the horseman’s wish and sets him off riding on his horse for eternity. G-d wanted to give the horseman the ultimate pleasure of divine presence, a joy that is simply out of this world and yet he only wanted a horse.

This story is true for many of us. We must arouse within us the desire to receive what is truly worth wanting; what G-d wants to give us. We give G-d great pleasure, when we hunger to receive His gift of presence and all the blessings it entails.

We then connect not only to G-d’s presence but also to our true self because our true self, the soul, is only interested in G-d. This is how King David so eloquently expressed it, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire none on earth... As for me, G-d’s nearness is my good” (Psalm 73:25-28); “My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You” (Psalms 63:2); “To G-d alone my soul waits silently, from Him comes my salvation.” (Psalms 62:2). “Yes, I will bless You all my life, in Your name I lift my hands. It is as if my desire is sated with fat and abundance, when with joyous language my mouth gives praise” (Psalms 63:5-6). In other words, to praise G-d and recognize His glory satiated King David like abundant delicacies.

When we see a magnificent painting, we are not attracted to a canvas smeared with paint. Rather, we are attracted to the beauty of G-d that is channeled into the world through the painting. But we often get confused and think it is the painting. We see a gorgeous person and we feel drawn to him or her, not realizing that it is not the person who is gorgeous but rather G-d who is gorgeous. Beauty is an attribute of G-d, and this person is only the conduit for that that beauty.

The soul is not attracted to things, but rather to the presence of G-d manifest within them. The soul knows that its’ ultimate pleasure and greatest gift in life is only to feel G-d’s presence — a joy simply divine!

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