

# **Sparks**

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## **Selfishly Selfless** **The Way to Self Actualization**

Judaism teaches that no character trait is absolutely negative, everything has a role. All we have to do is look at each trait with an open mind and determine the pluses and the minuses. When it comes to pride there is an aspect of it that comes from the godly grandeur of our soul and is therefore, truly self affirming. But there is an aspect of pride that comes from our ego which is self destructive; alienating us from our true inner self. This type of pride focuses on selfish concerns and social status; it embodies a desire for honor and one-upmanship. This type of pride confuses us to think that as an individual soul we stand independent and apart from the greater collective soul of the community. According to Jewish mysticism this kind of pride is self destructive because in essence our individual self is really an aspect of the collective soul of the community. We find personal meaning and fulfillment only to the extent that we daily serve the betterment of the Jewish people. An individual is not an isolated being floating in outer space; disconnected from a greater context. Rather an individual is actually an individualistic expression of the national soul of his people. I think this is one of the common epiphanies for Jews when they visit Israel -- their destined homeland.

I recall the first time I toured the borders of Israel and heard heroic stories about young Israel soldiers who valiantly defended their country from invading enemies and sacrificed their lives for the Jewish People. These selfless soldiers gave up their individual life so that the nation could live on. I wondered-- Is there such a reality called national life? Does a nation have a collective soul that encompasses our individual souls?

Jewish mysticism teaches that a nation is not simply the sum total of many individuals. Rather the nation is a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, each soul is actually an individual expression of the whole nation. Therefore, even though each of us is an individual we are meaningful only because we are members of the national soul. Our individual soul does not have an independent existence rather it is bound up with the collective national soul.

In addition, just as an individual soul has a body, so too the national soul has a body. The body of a nation is its land. The body of the collective soul of the Jewish People is the land of Israel. Just as you wouldn't want someone to cut off your finger or hand, you wouldn't want someone to cut off a piece of the land of Israel because they would be cutting off a piece of the national body of the Jewish people.

Jewish mysticism also teaches that our individual soul is also an individualistic expression of the Universal soul-G-d. This is the deeper meaning of the belief that each of us is created in the image of G-d. Each of us is a unique expression and manifestation of G-d. G-d becomes manifest through the unique vantage points of every individual soul. Therefore, there is no such thing as an individual soul that exists separate and independent of the Universal Soul--G-d.

Self-actualization is generally understood to mean that I actualize myself; I take care of myself, become fully me and succeed in my evolution towards individuality. My personal fulfillment does not

necessarily have anything to do with anybody else. This definition of self-actualization does not require any type of national responsibility or commitment to G-d. But in truth there is no such thing as an individual soul existing independent and apart from the collective national soul or the collective universal soul. Therefore, true self-actualization must happen within the context of the actualization of my nation's destiny because the individual soul is an expression of the national soul. And true self actualization must also happen within the context of the actualization of G-d's will because the individual soul is an expression of G-d.

When a Jew perceives himself as an independent entity; existing apart and separate of The Jewish people and G-d then he is actually alienating himself from himself. Since the true self is an individual expression of the national soul and the universal soul then when I neglect the need of my people and the will of G-d I neglect myself. To selflessly serve your people and G-d is the only true way to self actualization.

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