

# The Secret to Happiness

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Said the student to his Rebbe: "I want happiness". Replied the Rebbe: "First remove the "I" which is haughtiness. Then remove the "want" which is desire. After that, all that will be left is "happiness".

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## Part 1: The Hidden Light of Creation.

The pasuk in the beginning of Bereishis says "And G-d saw that the light was good". Our Sages say that G-d didn't want the light to fall into the hands of those unworthy and so He hid it for the World to Come (therefore it is called the "Ohr Haganuz" – the Hidden Light). Where did He hide it? He hid it in the Torah.

We can probably assume that this great light, which is the purpose of creation, contains the ultimate happiness that we can ever hope to have... But what does it mean that the light is hidden in the Torah?

To try and answer this question, let us take a deeper look at the story of Kabbalas Hatorah. The Zohar in Parshas Balak brings down the story of how G-d approached (the heavenly minister angels of) each nation and asked them if they wanted the Torah or not. They replied by asking what it says there, and G-d showed each nation the one thing that was hardest for them to give up. For Esav he showed "Thou shall not murder" since the strength of Esav is achieved by way of the sword, as it says "On your sword you shall live". Giving up murder would mean giving up the very essence of his strength and existence which "Seir" was not willing to do. For Yishmael G-d showed "Thou shall not commit Adultery". The strength of Yishmael is through numbers, as it says (Breishis 14:20) "Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princess shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation". By forbidding promiscuity, Yishmael's angel (Rahav) feared that it would not be able to maintain the strength of Yishmael's very essence, and so he too refused. And so it went for all the nations... G-d showed them all the thing that would be most difficult for them to give up, and they all ended up refusing the Torah. Not only did they refuse it, but they encouraged G-d to give the Torah to the Jewish people hoping that if the Jews would have all these restrictions they would never be able to prosper and would fade away. Indeed, the Zohar says, the nation's minister angels even offered to give gifts from their own power, so that the Jews would agree to accept the Torah. Esav gave some of his strength of the sword to the Jewish people, and that is why the Jews have been able to win wars (for example, during the reign of the Jewish Kings

and today in Israel as well). And Yishmael gave some of its strength of “numbers” to the Jews, and that is why the Jewish people have been able to remain a nation against all odds. And this, says the Zohar, is the meaning of the Pasuk (Devarim 33:2): ה' מסיני בא וזרח משעיר למו, הופיע מהר פארן ואתה – “G-d came from Sinai and “shined” from Seir (Esav)... (He shined from the strength of Esav onto the Jewish people) and he bestowed from Har Paran (Yishmael)...

The Zohar provides a parable. A wealthy and wise doctor discovered the elixir of life and wanted to give it to his only son. But he was afraid that his many servants would be jealous and try to steal it. So what did he do? He placed the precious potion inside a vial, and on the tip of the vial he placed a small amount of substance that had the smell of death. When he announced to his servants that he had discovered the elixir of life, they all wanted to partake of the incredible potion. But when they brought it close to their faces and got a whiff of the smell of death, they returned it to their master saying, “Master, this precious elixir of life is worthy only for your son!” And deep down they secretly hoped that the son would take the potion and die, and they would be the ones to inherit their master’s wealth. They even offered their master to give his son gifts from their hard-earned money so that he would be convinced to accept it.

This is a fascinating Zohar, but why is it that G-d asked of His creations to give up their most precious asset, their very essence, as a prerequisite to receiving the Torah? And what does the parable mean to tell us regarding the “smell of death” on the tip of the vial?

Perhaps the answer to these questions will also explain what our Sages meant by G-d hiding the great light of creation inside the Torah. It seems that the “smell of death” on the tip of the vial may very well be the method that G-d uses to hide this light. Furthermore, the answer to these questions may reveal the **path** to this great light that G-d has in store for the Tzadikim, and which He has hidden in the Torah.

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## Part 2: The Purpose of Creation

To answer the questions of the previous section, an introduction to the purpose of creation is necessary.

The Ramchal and many other Tzadikim explain that G-d created the world for one purpose only; to bestow His good upon us... Rav Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag (1884-1954), a great Kabbalist known as the Baal HaSulam for his commentary on The Book of Zohar, explains that the evil inclination is nothing more than “the desire to receive for the self”. This desire was implanted in us by G-d in order that He be able to bestow his good upon us. G-d wouldn’t be able to bestow his good on an entity

that was really just part of Him... After all, in essence, everything in the universe is G-d! Our bodies, our minds and our hearts are really G-d. Even our souls are just a חלק אלוק ממעל – “A part of G-d on High”. So how could G-d give anything to us, it is essentially giving to Himself? To solve this, G-d created us with a רצון לקבל - “a desire to receive” so that we perceive ourselves as separate from G-d. Since G-d does not have a desire to receive anything (from whom would He receive? He lacks nothing and there is no one else!), through this desire-to-receive we became separate and different than Him. (In truth there is nothing but G-d - אין עוד מלבדו. But we *perceive* ourselves as separate. This is one of the great paradoxes that man can never fully comprehend, and it requires faith. It is similar to our inability to grasp how on the one hand we have free will but on the other hand we say that everything in the past was really G-d's will).

While this "desire to receive" is necessary for our existence (otherwise we would just be part of G-d and not separate) it is the "opposite" of G-d -because He has no desire to receive anything. G-d has *only* a desire to "give", yet we exist *only* by virtue of our desire to "receive". Being opposite of G-d does not allow us to become truly close to Him. Because in spiritual terms, the more similar you are to something, the closer you are to it. And the more different two things are, the farther apart they are. There is no “distance” in Heaven, only “difference”. And this difference in our nature causes us “shame” to receive G-d's good for our own sake (as the Ramchal calls it נהמא דכיסופא – “bread of shame”). As part of G-d, our souls yearn to be similar to Him, like a branch wants to be similar to its root. Receiving causes us to feel the difference between G-d - the Giver, and us - the takers, which causes us shame.

So what is the solution to this dilemma? How can we receive the good of G-d without shame? We can't just negate the "desire to receive" or we would cease to exist as separate from G-d. Not only that, if we destroyed our desire to receive, G-d would no longer be able to bestow his good upon us, which was the whole purpose of creation! So according to the *Baal Hasulam*, our job is not to destroy the "desire to receive" but rather to elevate it to the point where we desire to receive only for G-d's sake and not for our own sake (this is the meaning of לשמה). Ultimately, we will all come to this level at גמר התיקון (the end of all “fixing”) and learn how to receive only to "give" pleasure to the Creator. In this manner of receiving, the best of both worlds is achieved. Not only can G-d bestow His good on us, but we don't feel the shame of being different and separate from the Creator through the act of receiving, since we are receiving only for *His* sake. This allows G-d to bestow his good on us, because the pleasure we receive is still enjoyed by His creations, but the enjoyment is for the sake of the great King and not for the sake of the "self". We are receiving because that is the will of G-d and because it gives Him pleasure, and not because we want to enjoy it ourselves.

This also allows for the enjoyment that G-d wants to give us to become infinite in nature. For if the enjoyment was only for the "self", it would be limited to the capacity for enjoyment that we were created with. For example, if one creates a cup that can hold a liter, once a cup is full, it can't receive anymore. So if the taking would be only for ourselves, then once we got all we wanted it would be over. However, if our enjoyment is for the sake of the Creator, then the greater the Creator is in our perception, the greater the enjoyment is. And since the greatness of G-d has no limit, so too our enjoyment will have no limit. In the World to Come, G-d will keep revealing a little bit more of his greatness each day, and this in turn will make the pleasure that the Tzadikim receive from G-d more pleasurable all the time, since their receiving will be for the sake of a King who never stops getting greater in their eyes!

But because this type of receiving (for the sake of the Creator) is a very high level, to get there one must first be willing to forgo any receiving for the self at all. The more we are willing to give up our desires for G-d's sake over the course of our lifetimes, the more we become worthy - and ABLE - to accept all the good that G-d wants to give us for HIS sake.

In all honesty, most of us are probably far from these lofty levels of pure *לשמנה*, but the more we train ourselves to emulate the attributes of the Creator in our actions and in our intentions, and by developing an attitude of **outer-focus** instead of **inner-focus**, the closer and more similar we can become to the Creator, and the more we are preparing ourselves to receive His great light.

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### Part 3: The Blueprint for letting go of the Self

The Zohar explains that the 613 Mitzvos of the Torah have two functions (1) "Taryag Itin" which means "613 eitzos" – advice, and (2) "Taryag Pikudin" – 613 Commandments, which include the great light of each Mitzva (פיקודין is a lashon of פקודין – referring to the light that is "deposited" inside each Mitzva). When a person reaches the level of *לשמנה*, he merits to feel the great light inside each of the Mitzvos. But before we reach that level, the commandments function as "Itin" – advice, i.e. 613 tools that help us learn to let go of the self and give our will and our lives over to G-d. Each Mitzva teaches us somehow to give up another aspect of the self. In every detail of our lives there are mitzvos. Whether we buy a house and put up a Mezuzah on the door and a fence on the roof, or whether we dress and put on Tzitzis, eat and bless G-d, harvest our fields and give tithes and leave Shikcha and Peah, we Jews are blessed to have Mitzvos at every step and stage of our lives. And if this wasn't already enough, our Sages came and instituted hundreds of mitzvos de'rabanam, prayers, halachos and minhagim. It seems that there is not a single aspect of our lives that is not governed by some halacha or another, even the way we put on shoes in the morning and the way

we are to bathe ourselves. The Torah - and by extension our Sages, teach us to constantly live **with** G-d and **for** G-d, and to love G-d with all our hearts and with all that we have. Why? Does G-d need something from us? No. But it is the peeling away of the 'Self' that is the secret to the great light and happiness that He wants to give us.

With this understanding, perhaps we can now comprehend what is meant by the light of creation being hidden in the Torah. The Torah is a blueprint for letting go of the Self and learning to give over our Will to G-d. Not only do the Mitzvos give us this (as in the "Taryag Itin"), but Torah itself (when studied) has the power to help us let go of the self, as our Sages say המאור שבה מחזירו למוטב - "The light in it brings one back to good".

But giving up one's will feels like "death" at first. That is what the Zohar means by the "smell of death" on the tip of the vial. G-d specifically asked the nations to give up the very source of their strength and existence before they would be able to receive the Torah. Why? Because the great light of G-d is "hidden" in the Torah under the heavy mantel of the SELF. If the nations had been *willing* to give up their deepest desire, the one thing that defined them more than anything else, that would have been the opening for them to be given the Torah and access the great light of creation.

It follows from all the above that attaining **happiness** and the great light of G-d is achieved when a person merits to change their focus from the SELF to that of being of service to G-d. We also find this concept hinted at in Tehillim in a number of places. Here are 3 examples:

- The Pasuk in Tehillim (30:12) says: **פתחת שקי ותאזרני שמחה - "You have opened my sack and girded me with joy"**. *I have heard explained that "opened my sack" refers to giving and providing. With an attitude of "outward focus" one finds true joy.*
  - Another Pasuk says (Tehillim 51:14): **השיבה לי ששון ישעך ורוח נדיבה תסמכני - "Return to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a spirit of giving"**. Again we see how the spirit of "giving", of being of service to others and to G-d, is directly connected with happiness.
  - (Tehillim 105:3) **ישמח לב מבקשי ה' - "The hearts of those who seek G-d will rejoice"**: What does "Seeking G-d" really mean? Those who seek G-d want to be **like** G-d; "Givers" and not "Takers". This, implies Dovid Hamelech again in Tehillim, is the secret to true happiness.
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## Part 4: The Secret of Messiras Nefesh

The Pasuk says (Tehilim 86:4): **שמח נפש עבדך כי אליך אדני נפשי אשא** - "Give joy to your servant, for to you G-d, do I lift up my soul. The Beis Aharon of Karlin explains that "lifting up his soul" to G-d refers to messiras nefesh. When we give over our will to G-d, we are essentially letting go of the ability / illusion of being able to control our own happiness in any way. But no human can live without at least *some* happiness or motivation. That is why Dovid Hamelech asks G-d, please give me joy G-d, for I am totally yours with complete abandon. When a person let's go of the self, they are basically saying to G-d, "I will no longer attempt in any way to make *myself* happy. I throw myself into Your arms, and You G-d, will care for me and provide me with the joy and motivation necessary to live and be of service to You." When we do this, G-d Himself provides the happiness. And when G-d provides happiness, you can imagine that it will be a much greater and truer happiness than when we attempt to bring it upon ourselves by running after our own petty desires.

What indeed is messiras nefesh? Many people think it means throwing oneself into a fire 'al Kiddush Hashem'. This is true as well, but there is a common misunderstanding regarding this concept. After all, there are many terrorists who are willing to detonate suicide belts and kill themselves for "Allah". What differentiates them from a Jew who is ready to die for G-d? The answer is simple, yet profound. Messiras Nefesh has nothing to do with what you are willing to sacrifice, even if it is your very life. As long as you are sacrificing it ultimately for your own self, it is a selfish act. When a terrorist blows himself up, he believes that he will go straight to Heaven and be given 72 virgins. He is actually doing the most selfish act possible - that of killing other human beings for what he imagines is his own personal ticket to eternal bliss. This is the very opposite of Messiras Nefesh! The words Messiras Nefesh mean "Giving over of the soul" and this does not require death or pain to be real. It can be achieved even during the highest levels of Simcha (joy). It is simply the desire deep in the Jewish soul to give everything away to G-d, to let completely go of the self, as Dovid Hamelech said "to you G-d, I lift up my soul". Every time we do an action that goes against our own will for G-d's sake, it is messiras nefesh at some level. Setting aside a time for learning each day, davening with a minyan and not going after forbidden desires are all messiras nefesh, to whatever level that we feel we are *giving over* our "nefesh" (soul/desire).

Of course, when a Jew dies al Kiddush Hashem and cries Shema Yisrael, he achieves the highest level of messiras nefesh. The words "Hashem Echad" don't just mean that there is only one G-d, every 5 year old can say that as well. Declaring "Hashem Echad" really means that we want to give ourselves completely over to G-d so that our will no longer exists as separate from G-d, but rather that there only exists G-d's will. When a Jew gives up his very life with this intention, he is giving up his entire self to G-d and causing the greatest "unification" of G-d possible. "Hashem Echad" really

means to say that all I have, all I do, and all I desire – it should be G-d's will. I am His; there is only Him. That is why Kriyas Shema is called “messiras nefesh” in the holy books.

When we read Kriyas Shema twice a day, we can have lofty thoughts of messiras nefesh while either imagining that we are being thrown into a fire for G-d's sake, or while we are rejoicing in being children of such a great and awesome G-d. It doesn't matter, for when a person truly gives themselves over to G-d in his heart, they wouldn't care anymore whether they are given everything by G-d (even all the pleasures of the world!) or whether they are being thrown into a fire. Because when it's not about “me” anymore, there is only G-d's will.

Of course this is a very high level to reach, but perhaps this is similar to what we can reach on Purim through drinking and rejoicing until the point where one no longer knows the difference between “cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai”. What do our Sages mean to say with this example? When a Jew is at the level of messiras nefesh – which is made easier on Purim through the high levels of joy we reach (and with the alcohol also helping us forget the “self”) then there no longer exists any evil. For no matter what happens, **all is G-d**.

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## Part 5: The Basic Stages of Altruistic Training in Life

Because learning to let go of the self and give over our will to G-d is the purpose of creation (so that we can receive the light of G-d) every human being is given training in this area from the time they are born until the day they die. Indeed, G-d structured the world in such a way that no good things come easy, as the saying goes “No pain, no gain”. Pain, by definition, requires some level of “letting go of the self”. If we want health, we must learn to sacrifice our desires and eat healthy foods (which, for some reason always seem to taste less good and be less readily available than the unhealthy foods are). And we must learn to exercise regularly, exerting ourselves and fighting laziness in the process. Even getting up in the morning is difficult for this reason. It seems preprogrammed into the human experience to have to work hard, be of service to others, and let go of at least some of our desires for a greater purposes. We were put in this world for this and we cannot escape it. But because the self is so strong (for it is who we are), we cannot just let go of it in one shot. It would be like trying to lift a van with our bare hands. But when a mechanic uses a jack to lift the van, he distributes his energy over many incremental pushes. By using the lever principle (as Archimedes remarked: 'Give me a lever and a place to stand, and I shall move the Earth with it') he is able to easily lift the van. Our lives consist of thousands of these incremental pushes, slowly teaching us how to let go of the self. And to this end, G-d has designed the lives of all human beings with the following stages of altruistic training:

**Level 1 - Parents:** Every human being is given parents on the day they are born. Through them we begin to learn what it means to have to listen to someone wiser and more experienced than ourselves, whether we like it or not. It's not easy for us at age 2-3 years old to begin to accept authority, but we quickly learn that we have no choice and do it anyway. Slowly we develop the wisdom to understand and trust that our parents have our best interest in mind and simply know better than us. We learn from our first experiences that we can't have everything we want, and that life will require some discipline and sacrifice. These lessons are forced upon us at a very young age until we slowly grow into it. Indeed, these are man's first and most crucial lessons in getting a step above the pure selfish desire that we are born with, as the Pasuk says: עיר פרא אדם יולד – "Man is born a wild beast".

**Level 2 – Siblings:** Through our siblings, we are forced again and again throughout childhood to recognize that **the world doesn't center around us**. We learn that there are others we must share with, give in to, live with, and stick up for. This is already a higher level of altruism than level one. It is a known phenomenon that single children who never had siblings grow up to be much more self-centered than children who have siblings. There is also a much higher divorce rate among single children later in life. This points to siblings being such an important and crucial part of the maturation of a human being.

**Level 3 – Marriage:** Marriage counselors will tell you that the secret to a happy marriage is **learning to put your spouse's needs before your own**. Marriage allows us the chance to mature to a much higher level of selflessness. While parents and siblings were forced upon us, marriage is not. Yes, we are kind-of tricked into it by nature, but if we want to keep the marriage going and remain happy, we must learn what it means to care for another human being. We must learn to understand someone who thinks differently than us, and really be there for our spouses, both physically and emotionally. Perhaps that is why G-d made men and women's brains so different (as the famous book "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" eloquently describes). If we had the same way of thinking, marriage would be too easy and we wouldn't learn to let go of our "selves" like we need to. Marriage teaches us the sacrifices that are necessary to the "self" for the purpose of building a true loving relationship.

**Level 4 – Children:** Until we become parents, we are still living in our own selfish bubbles. As much as marriage can help us mature (if done right), it is still kind of like a 'business deal' where both sides stand to benefit. But once we become parents, we are thrown in to a whole new level of selflessness. Parenthood is much less reciprocal than marriage. Our children don't give us back anything for all the tireless effort we put into them, and the sleepless nights we spend rocking them

to sleep and caring for all their little needs. (There's a saying "Parenthood is basically a series of things not going according to plan"). Besides for the immense amount of effort and sacrifice that parenting takes, we must learn to step down to the level of those who can't understand us (and who throw tantrums when they don't get what they want, no matter how much you try to reason with them). Parenthood is a big step forward in maturity and altruism. And as a wise man once said: **"The secret to being a good parent is putting our children's needs before our own"**. If we want to raise emotionally healthy children, this new level of altruism is something we will have to learn.

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## Part 6: Additional Stages of Altruistic Training

**Level 5 – "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread"**: By divine design, we must provide some sort of service to others if we are to survive and put food on our table. And if it were easy to provide these services, then our potential customers presumingly wouldn't need us to do it for them, hence they wouldn't be willing to pay for it. So we have no choice but to learn some sort of discipline that not everyone can do on their own, which allows us to be of use to other human beings. Learning a discipline often takes years of hard work and sacrifice. Those who drop out of school early and don't work hard, often end up working even harder down the line through menial and physical work. It is known that children of rich parents are often much more self-centered. When a child grows up with the feeling that all is provided without having to work hard for it, they can end up much less mature. It is the need to provide for others, in whatever capacity that one works, and the need to please the customers and interact with other human beings, that provides a much needed step in the maturity cycle of a human being.

**Level 6 – "You shall love your fellow man as yourself"**: Rabbi Akiva said, "The commandment of 'And you shall love your fellow man' is a great foundation of the Torah". Why is this commandment considered such a foundation? Because the entire Torah was given to us for this purpose, to teach us altruism and how to let go of the self! When Hillel was asked by a non-Jew (who was considering converting) to sum up the Torah on one foot he said, "That which you would not want done to yourself, do not do to your friend". Over the years, mankind has progressed and matured to understand that society can't exist without us all accepting that what I would not want done to me should not be done to my neighbor. Human experience pushes mankind in this direction. From the barbaric world of thousands – or even hundreds of years ago, the enlightened nations have progressed to the level where slavery has been abolished, human rights are embraced, and justice systems have been installed to ensure that every human being has the right to live in peace and freedom. In addition, advances in transportation and communication have made unity between

nations possible world-wide. The UN was established for the purpose of ensuring that all countries live in peace with each other and uphold basic human rights. (The fact that the UN abuses its mandate to consistently bash Israel over all other real human right abusers is just a symptom of age-old anti-Semitism, which is still alive and well today). In our day and age, when a nation on the other side of the world commits a crime against its people, the enlightened nations protest and come to the aid of the downtrodden. When there is a natural disaster somewhere in the world, many nations send help and aid. Mankind has matured so much over the past few hundred years. Most monarchies, despots and dictators have all but fallen to the dust of time, and the drastic differences that used to exist between the social classes (such as between nobles and serfs) have all but been erased, to the point where even the President of the the world's most powerful nation can be impeached for simply telling a lie! (There is a beautiful video called "[The Secret of the Jews](#)" that demonstrates how the nations are progressing and maturing under the influence of the Torah that was given to the Jewish people 3,000 years ago). As much as parents, siblings, marriage and parenthood can help us mature, at the end of the day, these 'significant others' are really extensions of ourselves. It is human nature to want to have a good marriage and to desire only the best for our children. But through learning how to truly love our fellow man and care even about those who we don't have any connection with, we are able to grow to even higher levels of selflessness.

**Level 7 – Religion:** The main tenants of the world's largest religions, Christianity and Islam, were taken from the Bible – the Book of all Books. Some Sages say that even the tenants of Buddhism originate from Abraham, as the Pasuk says (Genesis 25:6) "And to the children of his concubines Abraham gave gifts and sent them from upon Yitzchak his son while he was still alive, eastward **to the land of the East**". The Rambam writes that inasmuch as the religions of the nations may be misguided, G-d orchestrated for the nations to adopt these religions in preparation and training for the ultimate truth. By teaching their followers to let go of self, love their fellow man, serve G-d and trust Him, and to give their will over to G-d, even misguided religions were intended to be important players in preparing humanity for the real truth and great light that G-d ultimately wants to bestow on His creations.

**Level 8 – Old Age:** If a person would retain their full strength and power for as long as they lived, it would be a tragic blow when they finally died, going in one instant from a state of full ego to the soul state where only "lack of self" can allow for G-d's light to be felt. Rebbe Nachman once said, "A human being is like an onion; after one passes away, layer after layer is peeled away and all that is truly left at the end are a few tears." Perhaps it is for this reason that G-d created the phenomenon of old age. As we mature and go through the stages of life, we get closer to the time where we must return to G-d as a soul. Old age is G-d's way of teaching us how to start "letting go" of the mundane,

the self, the ego, and all the trappings of this vain world. We become weaker, humbler and more dependent on others. Slowly we are forced to let go of worldly pursuits, the fire of lust dies down, business and money making are no longer top priorities for us, and our bodies begin to slowly break down and become weak and sickly. Our eyesight and hearing also often dulls, further distancing us from full interaction in the physical world. **But** if used correctly, the aging process can be a valuable tool in the divinely devised stages of life, to help us learn to let go of the ego and self, ultimately preparing us for G-d's great light.

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## Part 7: The Heights of Altruism that a Jew can Reach

In addition to the previous levels, let us explore two additional levels of altruism that the Jewish people were provided with:

**Level 9 – Subjugation to Tzadikim:** Ever since the Jewish people became a nation G-d sent them Tzadikim to guide them, as the Pasuk says “And they believed in G-d and in Moshe His servant”. The Tzadikim in each generation are the bridge between Klal Yisrael and their Father in Heaven, as the Yidden said to Moshe “You speak with us and we will hear, and let G-d not speak to us, lest we die”. And as Moshe told them “I stand between you and G-d”. The Torah commands us to listen to our sages “and not turn from their words right or left”. Chazal explain: Even if they tell us that our right is our left, we must listen to them. Who are the Tzadikim that we must listen to? Chazal say אמר "דומה הרב למלאך ה' צב'קות תבקש תורה מפיהו" – “If the Rav is similar to an angel of G-d, Lord of the hosts, you should seek Torah from his mouth”. Angels have no will of their own. They are in complete servitude to G-d and can do only his will. In other words, a human being who has risen to greatest heights of altruism through the stages listed above and through great light of the Torah and Mitzvos, he is someone who can be a true bridge between you and G-d. Through Emunas Tzadikim and the submission to the words and will of a Tzadik without question or reason, even if they tell us that our right is our left, we learn to submit ourselves to G-d's will at a very high level of altruism.

**Level 10 – Serving G-d:** The service of G-d Himself is the highest level of altruism. And we humans need all the stages (above) to learn how to do this right, because G-d is abstract and it is very difficult for us to learn how to give over our will to G-d without being able to see and interact with Him directly. Chazal say that Chavakuk came and summed up the entire Torah in these words: “ צדיק באמונתו יחיה” – the Tzadik lives in his faith. By serving G-d without seeing Him, through faith alone, we can achieve the most refined and altruistic level possible for humans to reach, and this indeed sums up the entire purpose of the Torah and all the levels that we described above. Serving G-d

through faith doesn't mean "blind faith". It just means that we be ready to go beyond our understanding. This is because when we serve G-d only at the level of what we understand, it is ultimately the 'self' at work again. But when we are ready to go beyond our understanding, we are not just giving up our will, but also our minds to G-d. It is known that many Tzadikim are given high levels of understanding and divine light, yet they still choose to live on Emunah as Chavakuk said above. What this means is that they are always ready to go one step ABOVE what they understand, preferring faith over understanding in all their divine service.

Ultimately, we all need to reach this high level of true altruism, giving our lives over fully to G-d. It is for this purpose that we were given all the previous levels as a training ground. Through these levels, and through the great light of the Torah and Mitzvos, we can finally become proper vessels for the hidden light that G-d wishes to bestow upon his creations.

The Rebbe of Kobrin said over 150 years ago, "How bitter and dark is the world when one is immersed in it, and how sweet and bright is the world for those who are not immersed in it". Being "immersed in the world" means being immersed in one's desires. One can only feel the great light and sweetness of G-d if they let go of the self.

When Moshe said, "I stood between Hashem and you" (Devarim 5:5), the commentaries say that this means that the "I," the SELF, is the barrier between man and Hashem. All the works of mussar and chassidus stress the importance of bitul, of self-effacement.

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## Part 8: A Step Up in the Evolutionary Ladder

At the receiving of the Torah, Hashem said to the Jewish people: "For you are a Kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation". What does this really mean?

The world has 4 basic levels of evolution. The first level is DOMEM – such as dirt, rocks, water, etc. The second level of evolution is TZOME'ACH – which includes all growing things, like plants and trees. The third level is Chai - living creatures, from lowly insects all the way up to elephants and monkeys. And the fourth level is MEDABER – these are the "Speakers"; i.e. human beings. But Chazal tell us that there is a Fifth level as well – The Jewish People. We are literally an entire step up in the evolutionary ladder over regular human beings. Why is that? What makes us so special? After all, we also are born and die, we also eat, sleep and get sick. So what makes us different?

The word "Kedusha – Holiness" describes separation in the holy tongue. A Jew symbolizes being

separate and above our animal instincts. Human beings without the Torah are really just complex animals. Yes, they are MEDABER – Speakers, but they are just really intelligent animals. Without the Torah, humans follow their animal instincts, the same instincts that dogs and monkeys have. Of course humans are more “enlightened” and “cultured”, but at the end of the day, they are ruled by their desires. But G-d wanted MORE from His Creation. He had a plan for evolution to progress BEYOND just "intelligent animals". He envisioned a creature that was capable of rising above nature - even though it was hard, humans with a higher purpose! G-d desired a people who would rise ABOVE their instincts and become a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation - a nation with a connection and a RELATIONSHIP with Him.

The Talmud in Shabbos (33:2) brings down a story where the Sages were discussing the beautiful architecture, bridges and bathhouses that the Romans had created for the benefit of the masses. Some of the Sages praised their munificence, but Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai exclaimed “ **כל חסד דעבדין לגרמיהו דעבדין** – all the kindness that they do is really for themselves”. When the Romans heard that he had said this, they wanted to kill Rabbi Shimon and he was forced to flee with his son Elazar to a cave for 12 years. Why did it bother the Romans so much that he said this? The Baal Hasulam in the Sefer Matan Torah writes that the most significant difference between the Jews and the rest of the nations is that only the Jewish people currently have the ability to reach levels of pure unadulterated altruism through the great light of the Torah. Non-Jews are capable only of reaching a level of altruism that can be called “enlightened self-interest”. Through the giving of the Torah, the Jewish nation was tasked with being the trail blazers, as the Pasuk says (Yeshaya 49: 5) **ונתתיך לאור גויים** – “I have given you as a light to the nations”. Ultimately though, writes the Baal Hasulam, even the rest of the nations will achieve this ability, after the Jews have reached their full potential. But this will take place only after the Moshiach comes. Perhaps it is for this reason that Rabbi Shimon’s words bothered the Romans so much. They were loath to admit that the Jewish people have a unique Torah and unique souls, which allow them to reach a higher dimension than they are capable of reaching. Who knows, perhaps G-d even orchestrated that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai would be forced to flee to the cave and thereby reach the awesome spiritual he reached (ultimately authoring the holy Zohar) *specifically* over this issue. For this was the secret of Rabbi Shimon’s greatness, as he testified about himself at the end of his life: **בחד קטירא אתקטירנא ביה בקוב"ה** – “I have been ONE **attached** to G-d” all the days of my life.

The teacher of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was none other than the great Rabbi Akiva. The Gemara tells over that Turnusrufus Harasha (who was the ruler of Israel in Roman times) asked Rabbi Akiva why the Jews make a bris milah when a child is 8 days old. After all, if G-d created man in this way,

why do the Jews come and change G-d's handiwork? Rabbi Akiva asked him to bring a bundle of wheat along with rolls of freshly baked bread, as well as a bundle of flax along with beautifully crafted flax clothing. When the items came before them, Rabbi Akiva asked Turnusrufus, "Which of these are nicer? G-d's handiwork or the handiwork of man?". Turnusrufus conceded that the handiwork of man was far nicer.

In other words, G-d created the world with the intention that man should come and perfect it, turning it into something far more beautiful and valuable.

But what was their real argument; did Turnusrufus really care which of the items were nicer? On a much deeper level, their argument was a reflection of the fundamental difference in attitude between the Jews and the Goyim. Turnusrufus shared of the hedonistic view of his forefather ESAV; that man is what he is and he cannot be changed for the better. We are creatures of instinct, and although we may be able to act with honor and restraint at times, this is only if it ultimately benefits us and our desires. We can't change our nature, at the end of the day we are just intelligent animals. But the Jew stands for the opposite. We were given the Torah, which helps a person rise ABOVE their nature and change their instincts and animalistic drives. A human may be part animal, but he is also part soul! The light of the Torah can actually change a person, and that is what the bris milah symbolizes. This treaty symbolizes the idea that Hashem gave us this animalistic body unperfected with the intention that we improve it and rise ABOVE our nature.

Why was the symbol of the bris given specifically on this organ? Perhaps it is because the carnal drive is what tests a man's animalistic desires most. The Rambam writes (Hilchos Issurei Biyah 22:17): "There is nothing in the entire Torah that is difficult to most people like abstaining from illicit relations: Our sages say, that when the Jews were commanded on the prohibitions of illicit relations, they accepted those mitzvos with complaints and crying (as the Pasuk says "בוכה ל"משפחותיו"). And our sages have said, "(The two sins of) Theft and illicit relations, the nature of man desires them and craves them". Indeed, the whole world is steeped in this. Lust is displayed without shame today, and everything seems to revolve around this desire "out there". But we, the Jewish people, are a Holy Nation. We are the pinnacle of G-d's Creation, precisely BECAUSE we work hard to overcome our natural instincts through the light of the holy Torah!

At the bris milah, a piece of flesh is painfully removed from our bodies, and so too, the shmiras habris - the upholding of purity throughout our lives - is the true test of whether a person is ready to rise ABOVE their animalistic desires and fulfill their purpose. That is why both the bris and the heart

are sometimes called "ערל" - uncircumcised, as the pasuk says "ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם" - and you shall circumcise the "foreskin" of your hearts. When we uphold the bris throughout our adult years, we are, in effect, retroactively affirming how much we value this treaty that was made between us and G-d when we were only 8 days old, *without* us having had a say in the matter.

The Jew and the Bris are inseparable. This treaty is a symbol of what we stand for and of our unique place in Creation.

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## Part 9: The Exodus - True Freedom and Liberty

The Jewish people's redemption from Egypt is mentioned 50 times in the Torah and we are instructed to remember the Exodus every single day of our lives. Also, so many of the Mitzvos we do are **זכר ליציאת מצרים** - "A remembrance to the redemption from Egypt". Why is the Exodus so central to the Torah and to Judaism? The holy books explain that our slavery to Mitzrayim (which comes from the root "meitzarim" meaning "boundaries and suffering") symbolizes the slavery that humans have to the self and to their desires. G-d freed us from the bondage of Egypt and brought us to Har Sinai to give us the Torah. The purpose of all this was to free us from the bondage of the self and learn to serve G-d instead. The bondage was symbolized by painful slavery to an unrelenting master who refused to let us go and asked "Who is G-d that I should listen to His voice?". This is similar to our Self-Ego-Yetzer Hara who refuses to recognize G-d and let us serve Him. After the redemption, we followed G-d blindly into the barren wilderness on faith alone, and G-d provided us with all our needs. We had to let go of the slavery mentality and become a people of G-d through the receiving of the Torah.

One may ask though, why is the Exodus considered real freedom. After all, even though we stopped serving Pharaoh, but now we became servants of G-d instead! The Torah's many laws also seem to be restrictive and not freeing?

When G-d gave us the Tablets at Har Sinai, the Pasuk says "**חרות על הלוחות**" – "Engraved on the tablets". The word **חרות** – engraved, also means "Freedom" in the holy tongue. From this our sages learned: "**אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוסק בתורה**" - There is no true freedom but for those who are involved in the Torah". As explained above, the more we are involved in the Torah and Mitzvos, the more we learn to let go of the self. And there is no greater freedom than from the bondage of self, which allows us to receive G-d's great light.

A small example of restrictions being freeing is the game of soccer. Compared to other sports, soccer is very limiting, because you can't use your hands. So is soccer a frustrating game to play? For a beginner, perhaps it would be. If you constantly focus on the fact that you can't use your hands, then it would seem pretty annoying. But once you got the hang of it you would realize that precisely because in soccer you are restricted from using your hands, you become "free" to develop other skills - like kicking, chesting and heading - that otherwise you would never have known that you had.

Similarly, the underlying purpose of many laws and customs of the Torah is not to tie us down. On the contrary, they serve to **quiet the noise of our ego and self**, allowing us to tune in to the greatness of G-d's light and love.

Perhaps this is why the Exodus is mentioned 50 times in the Torah and why so many of the other mitzvos are tied to this remembrance as well; all to instill in our hearts that the underlying purpose of ALL the Mitzvos is to teach us to break free of our bondage to the Self and serve G-d instead. Yitziyas Mitzrayim is indeed the story of our lives and a parable for the entire purpose of creation.

In addition, on Passover we are commanded not to eat or find chametz in our homes, while at the same time we are commanded to eat the Matza, unleavened bread. Leaven symbolizes ego and self-inflation. Matza symbolizes the opposite; humility and subjugation to G-d's will. The words **אני** and **מצה** have the same letters besides for one, the **ה** and **ח**. And the difference between those two letters is but a tiny dot. In the physical reality as well, the difference between the Matza remaining unleavened or becoming chametz is but a moment of time. This commandment fits in beautifully with the overall theme of Yetziyas Mitzrayim, as explained above. The difference between bondage to the self - even when it is "enlightened self-interest", and between true **לשמה** - for G-d's sake only, is but a hair's breadth. And yet, it is the difference that makes ALL the difference; like the difference between chametz – a sin on Pesach, and matza - a great mitzvah! (One may ask, if Chametz symbolizes the Yetzer Hara, why isn't it prohibited all year round? Perhaps the answer is because enlightened self-interest is also a worthy level. Most people would be fortunate to live selflessly, even if their motives are ultimately selfish. But on the festival of Passover – which symbolizes true freedom from the self, G-d wants to point us all in the direction of the 'end goal' that we should all be striving for).

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## Part 10: The Role of Pain and Suffering

If the purpose of creation was for G-d to bestow His good on us, then what is the role that suffering and pain play in the overall scheme of things, and why is there **so much of it** in the world?

Many people have a misconception of G-d as vengeful or scary; threatening us with punishment if we don't listen to Him. This is a big misconception. When the Torah speaks of the "Fear of Heaven" it doesn't mean that we should be *afraid* of G-d. The Maggid of Mezrich is quoted (in the Sefer Toldos Yaakov Yitzchak) as saying that while "Fear of G-d" is a great achievement, being "**afraid**" of G-d is one of the worst misconceptions a Jew can have (as in, "Who knows what G-d will do now? He might kill me for this or for that!"). After all, how can we be expected to truly **trust** in G-d if we're actually afraid of Him? Would you trust someone you were always afraid might suddenly become violent towards you? And could a perfect G-d who has no needs and created us only for our own good, possibly be "scary", "mean" or "threatening"? Surely G-d understands us and loves us much more than we can imagine! **G-d can't possibly hurt us.**

So what does "fear of G-d" really mean? So the holy books teach us that there are two basic levels of fear of Heaven. The first level is simply the fear of G-d's awesomeness and judgment (as we are all taught from a young age). This is similar to how children first learn to listen to their parents out of fear of getting punished. But, as children grow older they (hopefully) learn to listen to their parents out of love and trust; knowing that their parents have their very best interest in mind – and knowing that their parents, being older and wiser, truly know what's best for them. They also come to accept their parents will – not because they are afraid they will be punished, but rather because they don't want to disappoint the people whom they love so much. In the same way, true "fear of Heaven" is actually the **fear of disappointing** such a great and loving G-d! It is the fear of letting down our beloved King, whom we adore and are in such AWE of. Because when we don't do His will, we are causing Him "pain" (kaviyachol) by preventing Him from being able to bestow His good on us! This kind of "Fear of Heaven" should increase our trust and **comfort** with G-d, instead of detracting from it (which often happens unfortunately, due to this misunderstanding of what fear of G-d really is).

It is also important to understand that pain and suffering in the world are not "punishments of a vengeful G-d" but rather more like surgery for a sick person. As we've discussed above, the universe was structured in a way that leads us all in the direction of altruism so that G-d can bestow His good on us. When humans act immature and run away from the tools that G-d has given us to help us achieve altruism in a peaceful and beautiful way, pain and suffering are the only recourse to strip us of the self until our hearts are broken, as the Pasuk says after the Tochacha: אֲזַיִנְנֶה לְבַבְכֶם הָעֵרֶל – "and then their uncircumcised hearts will submit and be humbled" to follow the path towards the light.

Why have the Jewish people suffered so much throughout history? All the curses of the Torah's retributions (Tochacha) have come to pass upon us through endless wanderings, expulsions, decrees, pogroms, crusades and the terrible Holocaust of the last century that wiped out two thirds of European Jewry in the most horrible ways imaginable. The reason we seem to be singled out by G-d for suffering is because the Jewish people were chosen for an awesome responsibility by the Master of the Universe. We Jews are like the King's inner guards, and the Torah and Mitzvos that we have are like the special uniforms that the King's guards wear at all times with pride. All those who see the Jewish people are supposed to be reminded that there is a Creator of the Universe. It is our destiny – from which we cannot escape – to represent the King and to be the ones to spread the will of the King in the world. How? First and foremost by changing **ourselves** through the Torah and Mitzvos, and by being an example to the world of an altruistic people who live for G-d (and whom G-d, in turn, takes care of with love). The Jewish people are the closest to the purpose of creation. When we fail at our task, we are “forced” back onto the path. The “curses” of the Retribution are not “punishments” per se. They are just the “long path” towards the goal that results when we refuse to take the short path. Our 'Self' needs to ultimately be “peeled off of us”, whether we like it or not. G-d desires to bestow His good on us, and nothing will stand in the way of His goal. As the parable of our Sages goes, there are two paths in life: The long-short path, and the short-long path. The long-short path has thorns in the beginning, but is short and sweet afterwards. The short-long path is easy in the beginning, but is long and full of thorns throughout the rest of it.

There's also another type of pain: “Yissurei Ahava – the pain of Love”. When the Romans were scraping off the skin from Rabbi Akiva's body with iron combs for having taught Torah publicly, he proclaimed with joy “Shema Yisrael” – the ultimate expression of love for G-d. His students asked him, “Rebbe, until here?!” And he answered them, “All my life I have waited for the time that I would be able to fulfill the commandment “And you shall love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength” - and now that I finally have the chance, should I not fulfill it?”

How can we understand this kind of pain? If G-d is truly good, how can He allow such pain to happen to such a saintly and righteous man?

Perhaps we can understand this through the parable of a love story between a man and a woman. They had fallen in love, but circumstances caused them to be separated by war, catastrophes and great challenges. Many people and circumstances, over many years, tried to break their love forever again and again. But throughout it all, their great love for each other kept them both going against all odds, and instead of giving up hope, they managed to overcome the greatest suffering and challengers by remembering their devotion to each other and always thinking how much they wanted to be there for each other. Finally they were reunited after years apart. We can all understand and

appreciate that the love and commitment they would feel towards each other after all they had been through cannot be compared to the love they originally felt. The great suffering that they had willingly undergone on behalf of their love, surely makes their devotion and affection for each other exponentially greater!

In a similar way, when Rabbi Akiva's pure soul finally left his body and was reunited with G-d in Heaven, we can all imagine the incredible love and light that awaited him, as he fell into G-d's embrace, for having given everything of himself and endured the greatest suffering, all for the love of G-d!

The same can be said for the Jewish nation as a whole. While much of the suffering we endured throughout the long and bitter years of the diaspora was needed as a result of our sins (as explained above), at the same time, the suffering of G-d's beloved children was ultimately a result of the great love story between G-d and His people. How many tens of thousands of righteous Jews suffered throughout the generations for their love of G-d and His Torah, sacrificing their lives with joy for His sake? Even the sinners amongst our people reached great heights by being killed only because they were Jews, dying "Al Kiddush Hashem" while reciting the "Shema Yisrael" prayer. And so, at the end of days, all the suffering we endured will ultimately represent the great sacrifice that our nation endured for the love of G-d, making that love exponentially greater and infinitely more meaningful and everlasting.

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## Part 11: D'veikus - Clinging to G-d

To reiterate the premise of this essay; the great happiness and pleasure of G-d's light is waiting for all of us in plain sight. When we are ready to strip our "SELF" away, it can begin to flow through us!

It is important to point out though, that if our only intention in being "selfless" is to receive G-d's light, it won't work very well (because this once again becomes about "me"). Instead, we need to develop a true desire to emulate G-d and become "Givers" so that we can do His will and become One with Him, as the pasuk says **וּלְדַבְּקָהּ בּוֹ** - "and to cling to Him". Our sages ask, "How can one cling to G-d, He is an All-Consuming Fire?!" And they answer, "One should cling to His Midos. Just as He is merciful, so too must one be merciful, etc."

Also, we must understand that letting go of the self is not just a "technicality" necessary for receiving G-d's light. G-d seeks a real **relationship** with us. Our intention in letting go of the self should come out of awe and love for G-d - for how can we not love someone Who has **only** our very best interest

in mind at all time, and Who is the source of all good?. And like a man who loves a woman deeply and does everything he can to please her, our intention in letting go of our will for His will should be to merit a loving relationship with the Master of the Universe. And when we learn to strip away the self with these intentions, the light of G-d will automatically begin to flow through us and we will merit true joy.

A Chabad Chassid once asked Rav Aharon of Karlin “What is Chassidus?” Rav Aharon replied simply: “Chassidus is all Heart”. The entire Chassidic enterprise, begun by the Baal Shem Tov and continued until this day with hundreds of thousands of followers worldwide, was established only to underscore this one concept; bringing the actions of the Mitzvos of the Torah more into the realm of the heart. As the Pasuk in Isaiah 29:13 says: **בְּפִיו וּבִשְׂפָתָיו כְּבָדוּנִי, וְלִבּוֹ רָחֵק מִמֶּנִּי--וְתִהְיֶי יִרְאַתֶּם אֵתִי,** - **מִצֹּת אֲנָשִׁים מִלְמַדָּה** - “With their mouth and lips they honor me, but their hearts are far from me – and their fear of Me has become a matter of rote”. Indeed, all the basic tenants of Chassidus, such as doing the mitzvos with joy, simple faith, pnimiyus of Torah, faith in Tzadikim, etc., are all part of this underlying theme, of bringing our divine service into the realm of the heart. (How exactly these tenants all tie into this path is beyond the scope of this essay). Because in order for the Torah and Mitzvos that we do to be able to accomplish the ‘stripping of the self’ that they were designed for (as in ‘613 itin - eitzos’, see part 3 above) the Mitzvos must be done with the proper intentions of the heart, i.e. with impartiality, fear and love of G-d, and by seeking to create a real relationship with the Almighty. “Clinging to G-d” is ultimately all about becoming a “Giver” like G-d is. And the Torah and Mitzvos allow us to develop this mentality more than anything else by creating a true “love” relationship between G-d and the Jewish people.

A story is told about a Chassid who came to the Alter Rebbe of Chabad to pour out his heart about his many misfortunes and troubles .

The Alter Rebbe responded: **“You speak only about what you need. But have you considered what you are needed for?”**

The chassid fainted; the Alter Rebbe’s attendant had to help him out of the Rebbe’s room. When he came to, he began to devote himself to prayer and study, without thinking of his problems and concerns.

After the chassid had conducted himself in this fashion for some time, the Alter Rebbe sent for him. Standing before the Rebbe, the vision of his previous yechidus flashed in his mind, and he could barely muster the strength to look the Rebbe in the face. This time, however, the Alter Rebbe spoke

to him gently: "Now that you have understood this truth.... You can return home...; may G-d grant you success."

The man made his way home and discovered that the gloomy picture he had seen previously could be corrected. A few favorable strokes of fortune had given him the opportunity to right his course.

The sequence is noteworthy. When a person merits changing their perspective from thinking about their own needs to rather what they are needed **for**, i.e. changing from inward focus to outward focus, all their troubles will quickly fade away for they have learned the secret of true happiness and have opened themselves up to receiving G-d's light.

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## Part 12: The Good Fortune of the Addict

Those who struggle with addiction and feel deep down that our "drug of choice" (be it be alcohol, narcotics or sex) is the most precious thing in the world, are fortunate to have an opportunity that few others have. When we come to the realization that our "self-will" is destroying us, we are left with no choice but to let it go. But this can be a great opportunity for self-growth. By surrendering to G-d's will and giving up our deepest desires, we have a direct channel into the great light of true happiness. When we are willing to surrender that one desire that overshadows all others, we are able to jump to very high levels and the light of G-d can immediately begin shining through us. If surrender of our will is done in truth, we can merit an inner happiness and serenity that few people merit in this world! For as we described in the previous sections, the secret light of creation is hidden behind the barrier of the self. Giving up our deepest desire is the opening to the Torah for us. The Nations of the world wouldn't give up that one thing they wanted the most, but when we do, we are essentially accepting the yoke of Torah and giving our lives over to G-d. For this is the essence of what Torah is about.

The 12-Step program of alcoholics anonymous has been used to help millions of people around the world to break free of all kinds of addictions. The first and second steps of the program are just about recognizing that one has a problem that they can't deal with on their own, and they come to believe that a Higher Power can help them. But the real secret to the success of the program lies in Step Three: "We made a decision to give our lives and will over to the care of G-d". The rest of the steps are only follow-up to that step, enabling one to do Step Three properly, for faith without action is like a soul without a body. Step 3 can't take root without the rest of the steps. But in essence, the program is really just all about step 3. (No one should ever expect to do Step 3 *perfectly*, but we learn to work in that direction).

Based on all we've discussed above, it is clear why this program works so well and has helped so many people change the impossible. Addiction is a symptom of self-will run amok, as explained in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous (Page 61):

Selfishness - self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles.... So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the addict is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we addicts must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even though we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power."

In the first two steps, we come to the difficult realization that a life run on self-will simply doesn't work. When we try to control and produce our own happiness, we fall into behaviors that only end up destroying us, and the addict is the best example of this phenomenon. When addicts no longer have a choice because their life has become unmanageable, they are forced to learn "enlightened self-interest", and learn to give over their will and their lives over to G-d to run. The rest of the steps help the addict to make this real, and when it does, G-d takes over and takes good care of them. The Self is stripped away, all the channels are unblocked and the light of G-d starts to flow through us. We become free of the obsession, no longer needing to resort to these destructive "self-medicating" behaviors. We feel happy, in G-d's hands, and are able to achieve sobriety and serenity. As they say in the program, "Give it all away to get it all back". To quote the Big Book again (Page 62):

We had to have God's help. This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom. When we sincerely took such a position, all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.

Religious Jews often question how the 12-Step program can help a Jew who was committing grave sins as a result of their addiction. After all, such a person should need a great deal of Teshuvah and suffering to atone for their past! There's a beautiful piece in the Beis Ahron of Karlin on Parshas Ki Sisa on the first Pasuk: **כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם ונתנו איש כופר נפשו לה'**. He writes that when a Jew wants to be uplifted and "fixed" from his sins and do a true Teshuvah, he should give his soul for a redemption. What does this mean? That he should be ready to accept upon himself complete messiras nefesh for the faith of G-d, and through this messiras nefesh all his sins become automatically fixed and he can come to the highest level of clinging to G-d.

Those who truly work towards the 3rd Step to give their life and will over to G-d to the best of their ability may be able to achieve very high levels of Teshuvah. For when we truly belong to G-d, the past is automatically fixed and G-d will care for us in the future as well.

It is interesting to note that addicts are generally more spiritual people by nature. The reason they had resorted to the addiction in the first place is often because their subconscious mind was desperately seeking meaning in life, and a "Higher Power" to serve. The drug, whatever it was, seemed to provide the answer those needs. So the drug became their "Higher Power", providing for their needs and offering what seemed to be at least a temporary "answer" to the problem of life.

But when addicts come to recognize where their subconscious needs are really coming from, they can become the most spiritual people on the planet, by switching their "Higher Power" over to G-d and by finding in **Him** the missing meaning that their hearts had been searching for all along. By developing a real relationship with G-d, and by internalizing that He is our very best friend in the world and truly provides us with all our needs, we finally become FREE to "let go" of our own needs. Instead of fighting our "self-will" as we did all along, we learn to surrender it and "let go" of it. As they say in the 12-Step groups, "Give it all away to get it back". That is why the program suggests we need to give up to 'win'; lead with our weaknesses to stay 'strong'; and 'let go' to get free. As our sages have said, אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה – "The words of Torah cannot endure unless one kills himself over it". The only way to get G-d and succeed in His Torah is to totally let go of our grasp on ourselves - our deepest desires, our pride, our fears and resentments... And this is indeed the path to the "Secret of Happiness".