

The Essence of the Torah and it's Purpose

by Rabbi Avraham Brandwien

"All the deeds of the Messiah will be for the sake of heaven, and his intent and purpose will be to exalt the religion of truth and fill the world with justice, to break the arm of the wicked and wage the wars of God, since a king is not crowned except to do justice and wage war, as it says, "So that our king might judge us and lead us in our wars."

(Maimonides, *The Laws of Kings*, Chapter 4, 10)

The aim of this book is to present a clear and broad overview, using an original and novel explanation of the essence of religion and its purpose, as expounded by the spiritual giant, the greatest interpreter in our generation of the Zohar and the Lurianic writings, the sublime Kabbalist Rabbi Yehuda Halevi Ashlag, of blessed memory.

The articles you will find in the book are from booklets that were published by Rabbi Ashlag in 1933. These booklets were intended for distribution amongst the general public as noted in the title of the first booklet, which says, "Dedicated to the dissemination of original ideas among the general public on the spirit of Judaism, religion and Kabbalah."

These articles were written in plain language and without Kabbalistic terms. One should realize, however, that these works were an integral part of Rabbi Ashlag's Kabbalistic philosophy and are based on the foundations of this knowledge, and

they constitute another level and synopsis of his commentaries on the Zohar and the Lurianic writings.

Our goal in this introduction is to present a comprehensive picture of the contents of these articles, and to emphasize the major topics they address. There is a basic need to clarify these topics even though they were written in a simple style, whereas our teacher aligned such seemingly disparate subjects as religion, science and socioeconomics. He integrates them into one bloc and creates a method according to which a complete system of value oriented society may be structured, along with social justice. And in order to better understand these topics, we must first elucidate our teacher's primary innovation, as will presently become clear.

The Essence of Man: The Desire to Receive

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi Ashlag's primary innovation was to base the entire reality of the essence of creation on one principle, namely *the desire to receive*. The 'desire to receive' means a deficiency that was not included in the Creator, and is actually considered the creation *ex nihilo*. Since the Creator is prior to all things, complete unto Himself, and does not need anything to complete Him, He clearly would not have the deficiency that is *the desire to receive*, and this is the true meaning of creation *ex nihilo*.

The desire to receive is thus the essential characteristic of the new creation, and everything other than this *desire to receive* is considered *something from something*, that is, a reality that derives from His own blessed essence, which is nothing new.

And this is how Rabbi Ashlag expressed it in his article *On Freedom*, in the section called "The Desire to Receive -*Ex Nihilo*":

"Regarding the lights and vessels in all the spiritual worlds, it was explained to us (in *Panim Masbirot* on *Etz Hayim*, Branch 1) that the novelty of creation, inasmuch

as it is considered to be *ex nihilo*, refers to only one thing, namely *the desire to receive*. All other components of creation were not new at all, whereas they were not *something from nothing* but were *something from something*. That is, they proceeded directly from His blessed essence Itself, as the light that streams from the sun, which is not new, for it is but that which is part and parcel of the sun that diffuses and emanates, unlike the aforesaid *desire to receive*, which is absolutely new. Thus, before creation, there was no such reality, since He, may He be blessed, harbors no degree whatsoever of the desire to receive, whereas He preceded everything. From whom, then, could He possibly receive? We may regard this desire to receive, which He, may He be blessed, created *ex nihilo*, as absolutely original, unlike the rest, which cannot be considered new and may therefore be called *created*. Therefore, all the vessels and all the entities, those of the spiritual realms and those of the physical realms, are defined as spiritual or physical matter, whose nature is *the desire to receive*."

So the desire to receive should be main object of contemplation, for on it rests the entire foundation of our service of God and our reason for coming into this world.

The reason God created His world was in order to benefit His creations, and since this was the aim of creation, it was imperative that He create a huge *desire to receive* whatever He planned to give, because the extent of each and every delight and benefit is measured by the extent of the desire to receive it. Therefore, the greater the desire to receive, the greater the delight, and the smaller the desire to receive, the smaller, to that exact degree, is the delight in receiving. So it follows that the very plan of creation necessitated creating an enormous *desire to receive* in the souls, which would correspond to the greatest possible delight with which He wanted to delight the souls, since great delight and a great *desire to receive* are equally proportionate. And However, the abundance that created beings yearn to receive is drawn from the Creator, from His essence and His everlastingness, and is something from something, and was not created.

The desire to receive and the abundance it includes proceed downward through four worlds – *atzilut, beriah, yetzirah* and *assiyah*. The meaning of such ‘descending’ is the extent of the yearning to receive the abundance, and the final place of descent, is this world, the world of *assiyah*, when the two are separated, when the yearning to receive is the body, and the abundance is the light of life within it.

Since the nature of the Creator is the Will to give, so it is thus also the blessed root of the soul. So the descent spoken of above is considered as a distancing of the souls from their blessed root, which is the desire to bestow. This disparity of form, between the desire to receive of the created being and the desire to bestow of the Creator, is the separation and distance that came into being between them. This is why the will to receive is not capable of connecting to its Creator, since they are opposites in their character and activities, since the character of the Creator is only to bestow, while the character of the created being is only to receive for itself, and therefore, the created being cannot receive the abundance that the Creator wants to bestow upon him.

In order that there be a connection between the *giver* and the *receiver*, there must be a parity of form between them, which refers to a likeness of deeds¹. Just as He acts solely in order to benefit others, so you should also act only in order to benefit others. When the created being makes his will similar to the *will to bestow*, whose entire goal is only to benefit others, then will he also be able to receive God's abundance, not for his own profit but in order to please his Creator, since the Creator wants people to receive from Him. This receiving, which is considered as a form of complete beneficence, is the necessary condition for spirituality, as Rabbi Ashlag says “that the *giver* and the *receiver* must liken their forms,” (*Talmud Eser Sefirot*, The Inner Light, Part 5, Section 37).

¹ It should be emphasized that defining parity of form as parity of deeds rather than parity of will demonstrates a fundamental principle of this method, that a change of will results from the power of actions, which will be explained further.

Parity of Form

You should know that the *desire to receive* is common to all spiritual and physical entities, and takes its form only when manifested in action, according to the way it is realized in reality, whether by giving to others or the contrary, that is, receiving only for oneself. That is, our understanding of all the mineral, herbal, animal or verbal realms that exist is dependent on how they are manifest in reality, that is, how they are revealed to us in sensory reality, and not at all by their essence, and not by metaphysical concepts or inferences. As Kabbalah says whatever is not in the realm of experience, cannot be defined by name or word. We do not even know ourselves other than through our actions and our relationship to others, since we can have no grasp of the essence of anything, including ourselves.

Therefore, our entire perception of the desire to receive is clearly dependent on how it appears to us in the actuality of our daily lives, and we understand it only in the form of action derived from our essence, but not the essence itself.

And when it becomes clear to us that will is determined in reality only by the revelation of its activities and deeds as, as explained above, we realize that the will is *variable*, and just, in its descent, when it encloths itself in a physical form when acting only on its own behalf. Thus it is also able to divest itself of this coarse form and assume a spiritual form when acting for the benefit of others. It should be understood that this is the entire distinction between spiritual and physical, namely that one who acts on behalf of others with all his heart and all his soul and all his might, is manifesting *spiritual* reality. In contrast, one who acts solely to receive for himself alone and does not give to others at all is manifesting *physical* reality.

It is now clear to us that what distinguishes between the physical and the spiritual is only the *form* which the desire-to-receive assumes and employs, and understand properly what is devotion to God, for we define this commandment as *parity of form*,

since it is only the form of our actions and our deeds that distinguishes between the spiritual and the physical.

As for considering the desire to receive as the root of evil, it is only so when the desire to receive assumes the form of receiving for oneself alone that it becomes disconnected from others and, of course, from the Creator.

We have already demonstrated that the desire to receive, which is imprinted in the soul, is a direct function of the great delight the Creator wishes to bestow upon us. However, we have also demonstrated clearly that the opposite form, that is, the desire to receive only for oneself, causes a break in spirituality, and then the created being is not capable of receiving God's abundance. In order to remedy this, restore the connection between the created being and its Creator, so the created being will be able to receive this abundance, the created being must check his desire to receive and transform it into the form of bestowing, so that he loses all desire to receive for himself, of acquisition, and works only in order to give to others, wishing to resemble the Creator, who *is* the desire to give.

In accordance with the extent of giving to others and of resisting to receive for himself, one's desire to receive becomes able to assume the form of bestowing and of likening his own form to that of his Creator, which is the desire to give, and then, everything one receives is only for the sake of pleasing the Creator.

This matter of *giving to others* is an application of the commandment to "love others as yourself," the general commandment which includes all others, the whole essence of which is to elevate man to the second nature of giving to others, as explained in the article "the Giving of the Torah".

Consequently, the way to refine the desire to receive is by occupying oneself with the Torah and its commandments, in order to please one's Creator, their main function being to refine the desire to receive only for oneself.

As Maimonides wrote (*Hilchot De'ot*, Chapter 1, 6), "The commandment to 'walk in His ways,' means that just as He is deemed gracious, you, too, should be gracious, and just as He is deemed compassionate, you, too, should be compassionate, and so on. A man must behave accordingly and, to his utmost ability, come to resemble Him," a concept which will be developed further.

I Created the Evil Urge for Him and the Torah Spice for Him

The question may be asked, how can the desire to receive be transformed if it is man's inherent nature that all his actions are solely for his own benefit? The answer, as explained above, is that one's will is determined by one's deeds, whether to give or to receive, and just as the desire to receive for oneself alone becomes our character, with all its egotism, only because we are always *acting* for our own benefit. So we also have the ability to transform it into the desire to give, if our deeds are for the benefit of others. Therefore, changing one's inclination, from the material to the spiritual, from receiving to giving, is possible to achieve by the power of giving, which has the power to change our nature.

The great novelty of this idea, which is a fundament of the entire Torah (as it says, that when the people of Israel received the Torah they said, "we will do and we will hear"), is that even by deeds done not for their own sake, the person who follows the path of Torah may eventually come to do them for their own sake, as it says in *Sefer Hahinuch*:

"Know that a man is motivated in accordance with his deeds, and his heart and all his thoughts always follow his actions. If his spirit is infused, and his effort and time are always dedicated to Torah and the commandments, even if not for the sake of heaven, he will necessarily lean toward goodness, and he will, through the power of his deeds, subdue the evil inclination, for the heart follows the deeds."

We must still ask, however, what would cause a person to occupy himself with deeds of giving to others, when every deed is necessarily for some gain, since a person is not motivated unless there is something for him to gain, or at least to prevent discomfort or pain. This is explained very clearly in *The Giving of the Torah* where Rabbi Ashlag says:

"The nature of any branch is close and comparable to its root, and all things agreeable to the root are also agreeable to its branch, which will favor them, desire them, and benefit from them. On the other hand, all things disagreeable to the root will also be disagreeable to the branch, which will distance itself from them, abhor them, and will also be damaged by them. This rule applies to every root and its branch and allows us to understand the source of pleasure and pain in our world."

We may thus understand the rule that follows, "that our nature is close and comparable to our root," which means that although the desire to receive is deeply imprinted in us, nevertheless, any gratification we get at all must be in accord with the nature of our root, and since the nature of our root, which is the Creator, is to give, the branch, which is the created being, must necessarily get all its gratification only through giving. This means that even when desire is aroused within a person, which is the desire to receive, he may only use it when that very receiving serves him as a means for the sake of giving to others; and if his receiving is not motivated by his wish to benefit others, then the form of receiving will be rejected and not tolerated by the branch, which appears in us as shame, humiliation and uneasiness when receiving the gratification, since it is contrary to the form of the root.

However, when a created being receives solely in order to give, he then realizes the two poles within himself. On the one hand, he fulfills the desire to receive, which is imprinted within him, with the extent of the gratification corresponding to the extent of the desire, and on the other hand, he also fulfills the nature of the root within him, for all his gratification serves him only as a means by which to please his Creator, and not for any selfish purpose. Thus is he likening his behavior to his

divine root, for just as He is deemed gracious, you, too, should be gracious. And this parity of form between the branch and the root is considered the greatest delight the Creator wished for us.²

This is "the inviolate law applicable to every branch and root," since the created being cannot tolerate any behavior in himself that is not found in his root. He will therefore necessarily repel any form within himself that is not agreeable to, and found in, his root. The opposite is also true, whereby this rule between every root and branch affects created beings positively. For by likening his conduct to his root, grace and refinement is drawn to him, like a branch that is nourished by its root. (See *Matan Torah*, sections 9 – 12).

What we did not understand above now becomes clear. Why would a person want to occupy himself with deeds of giving to others, if all his actions are motivated by self-love? As explained, because giving to others and thereby likening ourselves to our root gives us a good feeling, according to the law of root and branch, which awakens in us the motivation to do more acts of giving to others. In this positive manner, we purify ourselves from our desire to receive, and we magnify, with all our passion, the nature of the root within us, which is the desire to give.

² As Rabbi Ashlag wrote in *Or Habahir*:

"Beneficence is the goal: The entire goal spoken about by the sages, that is, to please His creations, is not defined by the dimensions of the vessels of the created beings for receiving, which are very limited...On the contrary, the matter of pleasing His creations to an ultimate degree could not be construed other than with infinite and unlimited vessels for beneficence, which satisfaction no amount of beneficence could quell... It can only be defined by the extent that the created being pleases his Creator, which is the delight and benefit in the purpose called to please His creations, that is, in the way of development He gave them in order to guide them to the sublime level of pleasing their Creator, which is indeed unlimited and infinite. As our sages said, 'No eye has seen it, o Lord, other than Yours.' We can imagine it in the reality of our world as the great delight a person has in making a huge feast for very important guests, which is the special delight of the vessels for giving within us, inasmuch as the ultimate goal of creation is the *expansion of the vessels for giving*.

Consequently, although our deeds were not originally done in a pure way, for their own sake, whereas we were still encloded in the tainted desire to receive for ourselves, nevertheless, through giving to others, we may awaken the nature of the root within us, which, along with our deeds, draws satisfaction from parity of form with our root. This work continues until we liken our form to giving with purity of intention, to kindness, which is the ultimate degree of parity of form with our Creator.

In *The Sulam (Introduction to the Zohar, Letter 138)*, it is said, "Due to a person's inferiority, it is impossible for him to straight away perform God's commandments for the sake of pleasing his Creator, for 'man is born like a wild donkey foal,' and his very nature prevents him from doing anything at all except for the sake of his own gratification. Therefore, one must first perform the commandments not for their own sake, that is, for one's own benefit, and one will nevertheless draw an influx of holiness by performing the commandments. Through this influx, a person will eventually keep the commandments without any ulterior motives, but only in order to please his Creator."

It therefore follows that everything is dependent on our deeds, for deeds are what determine and distinguish between the spiritual and the physical, and when will itself assumes the form of giving, then one merits parity of form, which is devotion to God. However, our desire to receive, which we attained through the egotistical nature of our lives, although one who merits the desire to give has no part whatsoever of this form of the desire to receive, nevertheless, it is not that the desire to receive is entirely absent from us, but that it is not manifest, like a body without a spirit, without vitality; and when we attain the nature of giving, and our only wish is to please the Creator, we can reawaken it and use it in the form of giving, which is how things will be when everything is ultimately emended, as it says in the *Introduction to the Zohar (Letter 27)*, "By working to negate this desire to receive [for oneself oneself alone], we may already attain the greatest perfection, to the extent that we may revive the body, with all its great desire to receive, and we

are no longer damaged by it and severed from our devotion to God. On the contrary, we overcome it *and we transform it into giving.*"

This matter of transforming our desire to receive was compared by Rabbi Ashlag to a guest who arrives at the house of his friend, and his host invites him for dinner. At first, the guest is embarrassed to eat, since he does not want free gifts, so he declines. However, if the host insists and explains that the dinner was prepared in his honor, and, if he refuses to eat, all his host's efforts will have been in vain, then the guest will no longer feel awkward. On the contrary, he will have a new feeling, that specifically by accepting the invitation and eating, he will please his host. His desire to receive is then transformed into the nature of giving, and then both are giving. The host is giving by serving a great dinner to his guest, and the guest is giving to the host by eating.

In this manner, a parity of form obtains between the receiver and the giver, since the guest, even though he is using his usual means of receiving when he eats, his hunger and his appetite, whereas he would not be able to fulfill his friend's wish and please him by eating at his table without an appetite, nevertheless, his primary motive for eating, and his main enjoyment, is from pleasing someone else. The functions of eating and of hunger, which were originally rejected due to embarrassment and humiliation, have now been transformed into honor and giving. That is, the usual functions of receiving are still operating as usual, but they have obtained a new form. The Kabbalah calls this *receiving in order to give*, meaning that the created beings manifest a fusion of two opposites. On the one hand, a person receives, and is satisfied proportionately to the extent of his desire to receive, but, on the other hand, he is giving, since his receiving was motivated by his desire to give not to himself but to someone else. Moreover, the pleasure derived from giving is greater than that of receiving, since benefit and delight are primarily derived from likening the branch to its root, as above and as explained in the book *Or Habahir* (see footnote 3).

Will is the Root of Intelligence, Intelligence is not the Root of Will

This truth, that the essence of man is the desire to receive, opposes the view that intelligence is the essence of man, and that the soul's eternity and immortality are dependent on the ideas a person has acquired during his life. For anyone who has ever attempted to acquire ideas knows that the knowledge and the ideas a person acquires are his acquisitions, not his essence or his self (*Introduction to the Zohar*, Letter 21).

On the contrary, thought proceeds will, because will arouses need, and need arouses thoughts and ideas to the extent necessary for obtaining what the will requires of them. Consequently, if the will is limited only to physical and bestial desires, then its need, its mind and its intellect serve only to satisfy this bestial desire, and although one may make use of intelligence and knowledge like a person, still, the servant is only as good as his master, and his intelligence is like an animal's, for it is subjugated and serves the visceral desire to receive, so that his intelligence is nothing but an outcome of his will.

The soul, however, which we defined as the desire to receive, is not eternal in its impure form of wishing to receive for itself, but it does become eternal when it attains parity of form with its Creator, and, to the extent that it has attained parity of form in its lifetime, so is its measure of eternity. For immortality pertains to the desire to give³, attained by a soul as a result of its refinement and labor in acts of kindness, and just as the desire to receive stimulates needs in people, which needs demand fulfillment, so does the desire to give, which is the divine soul, stimulate needs in people, which demand their fulfillment, and which fulfillment and satisfaction are obtained only by deeds of kindness, by giving to others.

³ It is important to note that the desire to bestow, which we have defined as eternal, is none other than the desire to receive, which is the general component of created beings that manifests in giving. That is, a person's desire to receive assumes, and acts in, the manner of giving, and by assuming this form, it is considered to have become the second nature called the desire to bestow, or the desire to give.

In order to change one's will, to the point where one has acquired the desire to give as a second nature, deeds are necessary. Deeds arouse the senses, and the senses arouse demands that must be met. As we have already shown, deeds have the power to determine the form of one's will, which is a basic principle in all this wisdom.

Likewise with performing the commandments, which are, in general, acts of giving to others and arouse spiritual senses in a person who performs them, which awaken a desire and spiritual need in a person to give to others.

This explains the highest root of our holy Torah as Moses, may he rest in peace, revealed to us, that devotion to God, and all the goodness meant for us, is unobtainable except when *we will do* precedes *we will hear*, in other words, when we understand that knowledge and ideas will not save us or enable us to improve our lives or our physical state. They will certainly not improve our spiritual state or lead to immortality. Only deeds can directly affect our lives for better or worse. For by acts of giving we liken our functions to our root and sense the goodness that is our entire measure of eternity, or, heaven forefend, by acting contrary to our root, we feel the evil and the pain that affects us and others from selfish gratification.

This explains the words of the famous Kabbalists in Kabbalah literature, that divine intelligence cannot be fathomed by human intelligence, since the mind, as abstract as it might be, is determined the desire to receive in a person, and if that person makes no effort whatsoever to refine his desire from receiving for himself, how can he contemplate intelligence that is entirely derived from the desire to bestow? For just as animal intelligence is a function of the bestial wish to receive, as explained, so is divine intelligence a function of the divine wish to bestow, whereas the essence of divinity is the wish to bestow, which is attained by the righteous in all generations as a result of their efforts in Torah and the commandments in order to please their Creator. This is the meaning of the verse, "The beginning of wisdom is fear of God;

and good sense is acquired by all who do them." By all who *do* them, for divine intelligence is acquired by deeds of giving and not by intellectual effort.

As Rabbi Haim Vital wrote in his introduction to *Etz Hayim* about his teacher, the holy Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, "He attained all of his wisdom because of his great piety and renunciation, after having studied books both old and new on this wisdom, and then he added more piety and renunciation, and purity and holiness, which is how he attained the holy spirit, and there can be no doubt that his words cannot be understood by materialistic humanly study."

Keeping the Commandments in Exile

After the destruction of the Temple, when Israel was exiled amongst the nations, there was a great spiritual decline, and the real meaning of the Torah and the commandments was forgotten. As a result, in the time of exile, the commandments are only to "place markers for yourselves," (*Jeremiah 31:20*). As Nachmanides commented on *Vayikra 28:26*, quoting the Sifri, "*It is like a king who was vexed with his wife and sent her to her father's house. Keep wearing your jewels, he said to her, so that they will not be unfamiliar, like new ones, when you return.*" Likewise, during the time of the exile, the commandments are signs and symbols for the meaning of the Torah, so that it should be possible once again, in the time of the redemption, to practice them with their intrinsic meaning.

At the same time, there is a special quality to keeping the commandments in Exile, because during this time, which is perceived as a time of *concealment*, when we do not see the rewards and punishments as promised in the Torah, and we do see the righteous losing and the wicked winning, all our service then depends on our faith in the Creator, whom we trust will reward righteousness, as He promised to those who go in His path. Because of this, it is our choice whether or not to continue serving God. Those who continue to have faith in God during this time, and serve Him and do His will for the sake of pleasing Him, although they are not rewarded for their

service, they are purified from the urge to receive for themselves, and they have satisfaction just by doing His will and pleasing Him. For all the goodness intended for us in future times is that we shall be able to receive beneficence through the desire to bestow, which we may achieve especially in a time of *choice*. This is explained in detail in the *Introduction to Talmud Eser Sefirot*.

The form of service during the time of redemption, as explained to us by our teacher, in the articles *Matan Torah* and *Mutual Responsibility*, is in keeping the commandment to "love others as yourself," which comprises all of the commandments. Fulfilling this commandment in its entirety is possible only when the entire nation, and each individual, foregoes his personal interests and cares only for others. This is the positive type of service that leads to the goal, which is to "love the Lord, your God," as will presently be explained.

We will now elucidate the advantages of the commandment to "love others as yourself," and why it is specifically this commandment that brings us closer to the exalted goal of loving God.

Love Others as Yourself is a Major Rule of the Torah

The 613 commandments are divided into two categories:

1. Commandments between one person and another.
2. Commandments between man and the Omnipresent.

The commandments between people have a great advantage over the commandments between man and God, as the Rosh (one of the great *Rishonim*) wrote in his commentary on *Pe'ah*, in Mishna 1, "The Holy One, blessed be He, has a greater desire for those commandments involving the will of others, than for the commandments between man and God." This is because they have the ability to accelerate the refinement process.

1. Which is because they are not fixed, and they change according to the needs of the community. For this reason, they cannot become *commandments done by rote*, for due to ever changing needs, there will always be new challenges to overcome.

2. It is also because they are a means to determine whether a person's deeds are really for the sake of God or not. For example, if he does less when he is not honored or thanked, then his good deeds are not being done with pure intent.

3. It is also because when a person sees the results of his deeds, and how they assist the needy, they motivate him to continue keeping the commandments, and develop his feelings of love for others and will, in the future, be able to keep them because of his love for God.

4. Also because there are four levels of love between people: love which is conditional and love which is unconditional, and each of these have two levels (as explained in the Introduction to *Talmud Eser Sefirot*, 69), and since love develops through one person and another, and is ultimately meant to serve as a tool for serving God, therefore, the commandments between people come first, for they are a means to attain love for God (see *Matan Torah*, Section 14).

Keeping the commandment to "love others as yourself," meaning that all of one's service should be for the sake of benefiting others, meaning that one cares about other people's needs before one's own needs, as explained in *Matan Torah*, is difficult for an individual to uphold, almost impossible, for how can an individual be so concerned about the needs of others, as this commandment demands (see the beginning of *Matan Torah*), when he is barely able to meet his own needs in order to survive? As long as an individual is preoccupied by his own concerns, he is not at all capable to even begin fulfilling the commandment to "love others as yourself." And if the entire Torah is based on the rule of loving others as yourself, we find that it is not feasible, that it is not actually possible for an individual to uphold it.

The Commandment of Mutual Responsibility

However, in order to obey this commandment, which is the totality of the Torah, the Torah teaches us *the commandment of mutual responsibility*, which is a necessary condition for accepting the Torah and a necessary condition for spiritual endeavor.

The commandment of mutual responsibility means that every member of the nation is a guarantor for the entire nation, so that behind each and every member of the nation, there is an entire society ensuring all he needs for his survival, which enables the individual to have time to devote himself to the exalted spiritual work of giving to others. When the individual is freed from concern about his own personal needs, he is then free and able to care about the needs of others. This makes the commandment to love others stop being impossible and become realistic.

Now we understand the way of life of the last generation. When all the members of the nation took it upon themselves to be concerned for the needs of others, to serve all of society so that every individual would be freed from the need to worry about his own needs, then spiritual development, which is conditional on giving to others, becomes possible, for this form of service is the practical meaning of loving others.

The above also explains why, when one of the members of the nation is negligent in this exalted work, and does not fulfill the obligation of mutual responsibility, all the members of the nation are punished together with him. It is because when one of the members of the nation is not conscientious regarding the commandment of loving others and ensuring their needs, but sinks into the corruption of self-love, he causes others to revert to being concerned preoccupied with their own needs. This prevents others from being devoted to the needs of others. In other words, he prevents them from doing their spiritual work.

This also explains the words of our ancestors with utmost simplicity, that the redemption of Israel is conditional on when the people of Israel are one union, as it

says in *Midrash Tanhuma (Nitzavim, 1)*: “‘God will be an eternal light for you,’ (Isaiah 60:19). When? When you are all a single union, for the people of Israel will not be redeemed until they are all as one union, as it says (Jeremiah 50:4), ‘In those days and at that the time, says God, the people of Israel and the people of Judah will come together, etc.’ When they are united, they receive the divine presence.”

These conditions were ripe at the time of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, where the people of Israel stood by the mountain as one man with one heart, and together they decided to renounce all personal acquisitions and devote themselves exclusively to the service of giving to others. The suitable conditions for receiving the Torah were thereby created. Likewise, at present, we must realize that the necessary condition for spiritual development by being occupied with giving to others is not sustainable unless all members of the nation unanimously decide to take upon themselves the mutual responsibility of being concerned with the needs of others.

The commandment of mutual responsibility extends to all mankind, particularly at present, when all of humanity has become a global village, and we are all so closely connected in everything related to socio-economics. One nation cannot ensure its survival unless all the other nations have accepted the commandment of mutual responsibility and the commandment to love others as yourself, as explained above. In which case, the condition for fulfilling the Torah ultimately requires that all of humanity be mutually responsible, deciding unanimously on abolishing personal property and dedicating themselves, each nation according to its ability, for the benefit of all mankind. As our teacher wrote:

“It is not enough that all of Israel be responsible for each other, for the entire world is part of this mutual responsibility... Every commandment performed by every individual Jew in order to please his Creator, and not for any remuneration, reward or self-love, advances all the people of the world to some extent.

“And when a person commits a transgression, meaning that he could not overcome and subdue his corrupt self-love, he tips the balance of the scales unfavorably, for himself and for the whole world, for by revealing the corruption of self-love, the base nature of creation is empowered... He thus causes the world to regress and world spirituality to degenerate (*On Mutual Responsibility*, Article 19).”

At first, however, the nation of Israel must serve as a transition for this exalted work and be “a light for the nations” (Isaiah 49:6), “For it is impossible to begin with all the nations of the world at once. In the beginning, it is sufficient that one nation begins the repair of the world.” (*Mutual Responsibility*).

Based on these words, my father and teacher, of blessed memory, the author of *Ma'alot Hasulam*, addressed these inspiring words to the workers in the land of Israel at the beginning of its rebirth (from *Tzvi Latzadik*):

"One may hope that we have found the good seed from which the proper observance of the Torah and the commandments will grow, so that we shall also merit the light that is attained by their observance. Into these good actions and deeds we must infuse the divine injunction to love others, for it is as though God Himself were standing before every subject serving Him on behalf of the welfare of the people of Israel. In other words, a person should expect that through his service on behalf of his people, he will merit closeness to God, who is the source of all truth, benevolence, pleasantness and gentleness. He will then feel the exaltation of the soul in every deed done for the benefit of every Jew in our holy land. During the millennia of the exile, we were unable to keep the commandments properly and in purity, and to fully realize the purpose for which they were given. We have now been given the opportunity to become purified and sanctified, to study and strive adequately, until we have achieved complete enlightenment, which is the redemption of both body and soul.

"For the body also achieves perfection alongside the perfection of knowledge, and when the children of Israel achieve complete knowledge, the wellsprings of understanding and knowledge will overflow. They will extend beyond the borders of Israel and will irrigate all the nations, as it says, "Then shall the earth be full of the knowledge of God, etc.," and, "They will flow toward the goodness of God."

This would explain why it was not necessary, in exile, to reveal the essence of the service of God in this positive manner, for it was impossible to apply it in the difficult conditions of exile, when the people of Israel were subjugated to other nations and had no political or economic freedom. At present, however, since the nation of Israel, for the most part, has returned to its land, it has been given the opportunity to keep the commandments according to their true essence, and not only as *landmarks*, for the conditions are favorable, and the possibility of divine service, according to its intrinsic content, has been created. The state of *not necessary* has now been transformed into *necessary*, to reveal the original essence of religion, which is based on pure love for others.

Which is why Rabbi Ashlag, our teacher, wished to disclose the original meaning of religion and Judaism "in its pure state" particularly at this time in history, because observing the religion and the commandment to love others as oneself has already left the realm of the impossible and has become an actual possibility.

This is what is explained in this book, that the essence of religion is to develop the ability to discern the evil within oneself, which is the desire to receive for oneself, and by discerning the evil within oneself, working on distancing it from oneself, which is the essence of one's work, that is, to renounce the desire to receive for oneself. Just as explained above, and as explained in the articles, the best advice for attaining purity and impeccability of will is through the commandment to love others as yourself, the practical character of which is to benefit others with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. Through this form of service we merit parity of form with our blessed root, which is the desire to bestow, and we

merit eternity. Sustainability of this service of benefiting others, as we have shown above, requires that an entire people, and all mankind, take mutual responsibility upon themselves and choose love for others instead of self-love, for then we will have become capable of fulfilling the Torah.

The direction of religion must therefore be shifted from its negative, exile form, which caused rifts between the people of Israel, among themselves and with the nations, to the direction of an affirmative religion, without changing any of the actual commandments, as far as the people of Israel are concerned, but by emphasizing love for others by integrating the commandment to “love others as yourself, I am God.” We will thereby direct the feelings of love within ourselves toward the goal of attaining love for God, since the preparation and the means must be in the same direction as the goal, which is to give and to love. In other words, when our entire aim in keeping the Torah, and the commandments included in the commandment to love others, is to develop the desire within ourselves to give, in order to achieve parity of form and eternal devotion, then fulfillment of the commandments must also be directed toward beneficence, and not in order to receive a reward. Otherwise, the means would be contrary to the intent the goal.

The all-inclusive commandment to “love others as yourself, I am God,” is therefore the means to achieve the goal, which is the commandment to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might.”

This is how we merit achieving devotion to God and receiving His beneficence, and it is how the ultimate goal of creation is realized through us, which is “His desire to benefit His creations.”

The Religion of Truth – The Theory of Beneficence

The following quote is from our teacher Rabbi Ashlag's holy manuscript. It sums up what we have written so far and also clarifies the quote from Maimonides regarding

the Messiah with which we began this introduction. "All the deeds of the Messiah will be for the sake of heaven, and his intent and purpose will be to exalt the religion of truth and fill the world with justice."

"The basis of my entire exposition is the desire to receive, which is imprinted in every created being, and which is a variance in form from that of the Creator. Consequently, the spirit is separated from him like a limb that has been severed from the body, because a change in form in the spiritual realm, is like the fell of an ax in the physical realm.

"This clarifies what God wants from us, *which is parity of form, for then we will be devoted to Him again, as prior to our creation*. As the sages said, "Cling to His attributes. Just as He is compassionate, etc." (*Sofrim*, Chapter 3). This means that we should change our disposition, which is the desire to receive, and emulate the disposition of the Creator, which is only to bestow, so that all our deeds be only in order to bestow upon others and be helpful to them to the best of our ability. In this manner, we will arrive at the goal of devotion to Him, which is parity of form. As for what a person must necessarily do for himself, i.e., the minimum for his sustenance and his family's sustenance, this is not considered disparity of form, because necessities are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy.

"This is the great revelation, which will not be revealed in its entirety until the days of the Messiah, and when this teaching will be received, we will merit complete redemption, and so on.

"And if all the nations of the world agree to this, then all the wars of the world will cease, for everyone will be interested not in their own welfare but in the welfare of others...

"*This teaching regarding parity of form is the teaching of the Messiah*. About which it says (*Micha* 4:1), 'It shall come to pass in the end of days, that the mountain of the

house of the Lord will be first among the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and nations will flow to it. Many nations will then say, "Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us of His ways and we may walk in his ways. Then shall Torah come forth from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem."

"He will adjudicate between the many nations.' That is, the Messiah will teach them the service of God through parity of form, through emulation, which is the teaching and the law of the Messiah.

"He will reprimand powerful, distant nations.' That is, he will show them that if they do not undertake the service of God, then all the nations will be decimated by war.

"If they accept his teaching, however, then, as it says, 'They will beat their swords into spades, and their spears into shears. Nation against nation shall not bear arms, and they shall study the art of war no more.' (*Micha 4:3*)"

These words make it perfectly clear to every one of us that the Torah is not a national issue privately owned by the people of Israel but was intended for all of mankind, to be guided in the ways of beneficence and to achieve their spiritual and eternal station as expressed by His idea of creation. The people of Israel, however, through the refinement of the souls of their forefathers, and their subjugation in exile, will be ready before the other nations to accept this exalted role (as explained in *The Giving of the Torah* and in *Mutual Responsibility*), since the essence of that dreadful exile was none other than corrupt self-love, which was the cause of all the wars and massacres the people of Israel have known only too well. We must therefore awaken the national feelings that stir within us, as they were manifest in our ancestors at Mount Sinai, and take it upon ourselves to be the pioneers of this lofty mission, which is to fulfill the commandment of mutual responsibility and to benefit others in the manner that an altruistic society would require. Along with our success in leading an altruistic society, we will also be able to realize our purpose as

a light for the nations and show all of mankind the ways of the divine, which are the ways of benevolence. In this manner, the nations will also merit their actualization as intended for them by the Creator before He created them. "And when they do so, it will be revealed to all that when God is served, all traces of envy and hatred will be eradicated from mankind, for then all the members of mankind will be united as one body with one heart, filled with the knowledge of God, for world peace and knowledge of God are one and the same."

As it is written in the Prophets, "For the whole world will be filled with the knowledge of God, as water covers the sea," (*Isaiah* 11:9). As it also says in *Midrash Rabba* (*Beresheet* 88:7), "On that day I shall rebuild the shelter of David" (*Amos* 9:11) so that the whole world will be one union, as it says (*Zefaniah* 3:9), "For then shall I transform the nations to speak clearly and call upon the name of God and serve Him together."

As explained, the inner meaning of religion is the teaching about giving, which is the way to achieve parity of form with God, which is a religion of truth, and world peace and justice depend on its realization (as will be explained in the treatise *On Peace*). This wisdom is to be found in the Kabbalah literature and particularly in *Talmud Eser Sefirot*, which was written by our teacher Rabbi Ashlag and addresses the matter of beneficence as required by individuals and by all of mankind in order to repair the world.