

For Judaism: Orchot Tzaddikim: Walking the Righteous Pathways of Jewish Tradition

Andrii Zvorygin yN-PH2196 mtH2a1 & GPT4
attender of Glad Tidings Fellowship, Tara, ON

October 16, 2023

1 Disclaimer

This leaflet is meant to guide one on the blessed path of good inclination in Judaism. In our daily lives, we are confronted with choices steered by our Yetzer HaTov (good inclination) and Yetzer HaRa (evil inclination). Cultivating and strengthening our Yetzer HaTov is pivotal to living a righteous life and aspiring for spiritual elevation. Deuteronomy 4:29 encourages us to, “But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” As Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) advises, “Be as diligent in performing a minor mitzvah as in a major one” (Avot 2:1). In every act, decision, and thought, lean towards the light of the Yetzer HaTov and the path leading to paradise. Always pursue truth and cling to what resonates genuinely with your heart and soul.

2 Introduction:

The path of Torah observance is not just a one-time decision but a lifelong commitment, a continuous cycle of turning and returning to Hashem with love and devotion. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5) As we walk in the ways of our ancestors, we are reminded that our relationship with God is dynamic, ever-evolving, and deepening. “As water reflects the face, so one’s life reflects the heart.” (Proverbs 27:19) In every moment of joy, challenge, or introspection, our heart’s inclination should be towards Hashem’s love

and guidance. “You shall follow His ways, and fear Him.” (Deuteronomy 8:6) This journey is not about mere adherence but about weaving a tapestry of love, trust, and reverence, intertwining our lives with the divine will.

3 Trusting in God’s Provision:

In the face of life’s unpredictabilities, the wisdom of Solomon counsels, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5). Our sages in the Talmud have expressed the sentiment that if one dedicates themselves to God and His teachings, provisions will follow: “Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, from him will be taken away the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly cares; but anyone who casts off the yoke of Torah, upon him will be laid the yoke of government and the yoke of worldly cares.” (Avot 3:5). Thus, by committing ourselves to the divine path, we trust in Hashem’s provision and care.

4 Embracing the Divine Within and Beyond:

The presence of Hashem permeates every facet of creation, beckoning us to recognize and draw closer. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalms 139:7) The Zohar, the foundational work of Jewish mysticism, teaches that divine sparks are present in all things, waiting to be elevated. By connecting with these sparks, we are able to experience the Divine in the mundane and to transform the ordinary into the sacred. The prophet Isaiah reminds us: “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 40:28) Our calling is to be in a constant state of awareness and to cultivate a heart that seeks Hashem in all things. The Shema encapsulates our unwavering devotion and the core of our faith: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) As King David sang, “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” (Psalms 24:1) Through this deep understanding, we bridge the gap between the terrestrial and the celestial, embracing the divine within and beyond.

5 Serving One Another with Humility:

The essence of humble service is beautifully encapsulated in the teachings of our sages. The Talmud, in Sanhedrin 37a, underscores the inherent value and sanctity of every individual: "For this reason, humans were created singly, to teach you that whoever destroys a single soul... it is as if he destroyed an entire world; and whoever saves a single soul... it is as if he saved an entire world." This profound recognition of the worth of each soul must guide our interactions and acts of service.

Moreover, the Torah instructs us, "You shall not seek greatness for yourself, and you shall not lust for honor; more than you have studied, do, and desire to learn more than to teach" (Avot 6:5). True leadership in Judaism is not about ruling or gaining dominion over others but about serving them with humility and compassion. The great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai exemplified this when he said, "Let your fellow's honor be as dear to you as your own" (Avot 2:10).

We are further reminded by King Solomon's wisdom: "Pride precedes destruction; an arrogant spirit appears before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). In juxtaposition, our true strength and influence lie in our humility and commitment to serve others selflessly. Embracing this ethos, we emulate leaders like Moses, whom the Torah describes as the most humble of all individuals (Numbers 12:3). By approaching service with humility, not only do we elevate ourselves but also uplift those around us, reflecting the divine image in which we were all created.

6 Embracing Forgiveness, Love, and Acceptance:

The sage Hillel once summarized the entire Torah while standing on one foot, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation." (Shabbat 31a) This captures the essence of "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) Furthermore, our tradition teaches us the value of overlooking transgressions and seeking peace. Proverbs counsels, "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the Lord, and He will deliver you." (Proverbs 20:22) and "It is one's glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11)

The Talmud also expounds upon the idea of responding to harm or insult without malice. Rabbi Eleazar said, "Be pliant like a reed, not hard like a cedar" (Ta'anit 20b), highlighting the value of humility and adaptability in the face of adversity. Instead of harboring resentment, we are encouraged to cultivate a forgiving heart and an understanding spirit, recognizing the shared divine spark in each individual and seeking unity even in the face of conflict.

7 An Unyielding Love:

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 24:7) recounts that God's covenant with Abraham signifies an unbreakable bond with the Jewish people. Upholding this covenant entails internalizing Hashem's boundless love for all creation and reflecting it in our own actions. "You have been shown, to know that the LORD, He is God; there is none else besides Him." (Deuteronomy 4:35)

Through divine inspiration, our hearts can be transformed to resonate with God's love. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of this spiritual metamorphosis, proclaiming, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26) This softened, God-transformed heart compels us to act with unyielding love, kindness, and righteousness.

Furthermore, our sages teach that the righteous, through their deeds and loving-kindness, earn a place in the World to Come. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (4:16) states, "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the lobby so that you may enter the banquet hall." The 'banquet hall' symbolizes Olam HaBa, the World to Come, suggesting that our conduct in this world, guided by our God-transformed hearts, determines our place in the next. By living a life marked by love, kindness, and adherence to Torah values, we not only sanctify our own souls but also pave our way towards eternal closeness with Hashem.

8 Closing:

Every step we take in observance is a step closer to fulfilling our collective destiny as "a light unto the nations." (Isaiah 42:6) Our commitment to Torah and mitzvot is akin to keeping our spiritual lamps filled with

the pure oil of Hashem's love and wisdom. Through deep prayer, meditation, and heartfelt commitment, we seek to draw closer to the Ruach HaKodesh (Divine Spirit), which serves as the source of this illuminating oil. Just as a lamp cannot shine without oil, our souls cannot truly radiate without continuous nurturing through Torah study, acts of kindness, and love for all of Hashem's creations. The Psalms remind us, "The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart." (Proverbs 20:27)

We must remain vigilant and steadfast in our spiritual journey, ensuring our inner light never dims. As the Talmud teaches, "When a person departs from the world, all his deeds come and present themselves to him" (Avo-

dah Zarah 20b). And Ecclesiastes reminds us, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Recognizing the weight of this judgment underscores the importance of maintaining our connection to Hashem and our commitment to love, kindness, and Torah throughout our lives. Awaiting the ultimate redemption, as prophesied "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life..." (Daniel 12:2), we uphold our role as Hashem's emissaries on Earth, drawing ever nearer to our divine purpose and destiny.

"May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." (Ruth 2:12)