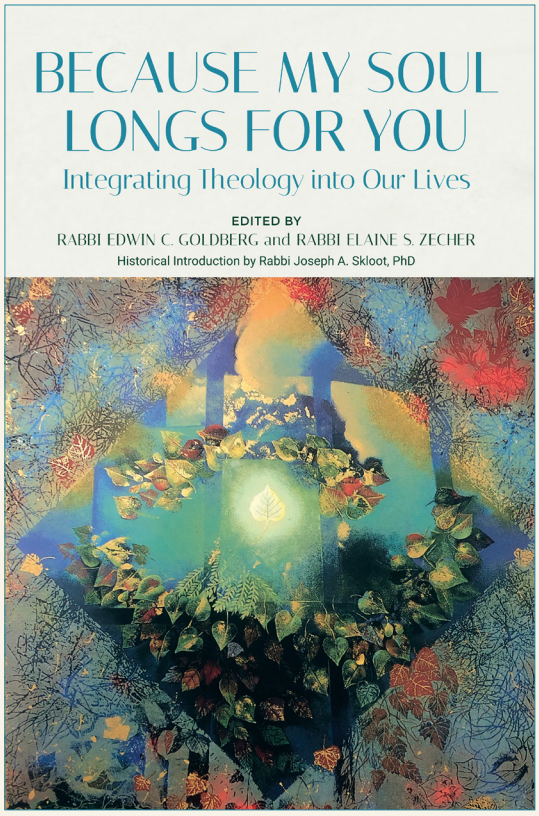


# Because My Soul Longs for You

## *Integrating Theology into Our Lives*

Study and Discussion Guide by

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# Introduction

It is a blessing to experience God in our life. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav teaches that our connection to the Divine takes place above us, around us, and within us. The chapters in this book reflect the ways in which each of its authors experiences the Divine, through their heightened awareness, their practice, and their innermost longings. At a time when humanity is vulnerable and uncertain of every next moment, we glean sparks of comfort and hope through their paths. We may even appropriate them for ourselves. The following guide attempts to assist each of us to enter and explore these paths—to find meaning and moments of divinity for ourselves.

This study guide was composed for adult learning. We suggest a series of six sessions of sixty to ninety minutes each. These sessions may occur in synagogue settings, independent *chavurot*, book clubs, and other groups who wish to explore Jewish spirituality in our time. The content of the essays lends itself to all ages and stages, with a particular attraction for those feeling confined, confused, or just out of touch with the traditional modes of encounter with the Divine. In order to have meaningful, honest, and personal conversations, it is suggested that groups comprise no more than twelve participants, plus a facilitator. Sessions may be divided into (1) a summary of the essay; (2) a whole-class or small-group response to the provided quote; (3) the implementation of the spiritual exercise; and (4) an opportunity to "unpack" the lesson and its value for the participants both as a review of the book's essays and as insight into personal spiritual openings. In general, participants are asked to consider:

1. What did I learn about the author's experience of God?
2. How did the author's experience resonate with my own understanding or experience of God in my life?
3. What *chidush*—"new idea, new way of seeing and feeling one's own spiritual life"—emerged from these essays?

# Unit I

## Chapter 1: Experiencing God While Watching the Universe

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, עוֹשֶׂה מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית.

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, oseh maaseih v'reishit.*

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the universe, Maker of the work of creation.[1]

1. In chapter 1, Rabbi John L. Rosove discusses two questions: "Do I believe in God?" and "How do I and how can I experience myself as a spiritual being?"[2] He offers two common contemporary responses. Which one is closest to your response?
   a. "I'm a religious person in that I feel a connection to something eternal and infinite that's in my soul and in yours. But I don't believe in a personal God, and all this talk about God as King and me as servant is meaningless to me."[3]
   b. "I'm grateful for the gifts of health, meaningful work, and love. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by gratitude and a sense of inadequacy to express how much I feel blessed, and that's about as close as I come to prayer. But that prayer is addressed to life itself and to no one in particular, and surely not to 'God.'"[4]

2. Rabbi Rosove quotes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: "Our radical amazement responds to the mystery, but does not produce it. You and I have not invented the grandeur of the sky nor endowed the human being with the mystery of birth and death. We do not create the ineffable, we encounter it."[5]
   a. What moves you to wonder in your life? To gratitude?
   b. Is there a relationship between the two?

3. Heschel continues: "Left-brain thinking will never bring us into God's presence nor give us a glimpse of God's reality. It is only through the non-rational, intuitive, symphonic, aesthetic, creative, and imaginative faculties that we can suspend time, reason, and logic enough to glimpse a moment of God's eternity."

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1 *Mishnah*, *B'rachot* 9:2 includes this blessing to be said upon viewing various wonders of the world: "[Upon seeing] mountains, hills, seas, rivers, and deserts." In medieval times, Rabbi Abraham ben Moses (Maimonides's son) advised seeking out these places, saying, "In order to serve God, one needs access to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature, such as the contemplation of flower-decorated meadows, majestic mountains, flowing rivers . . . for all these are essential to the spiritual development of even the holiest people."

2 Rabbi John L. Rosove, p. 5.

3 Rabbi John L. Rosove, p. 4.

4 Rabbi John L. Rosove, p. 4.

5 Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1959), 47.

a. What does it take to "to suspend time, reason and logic"? Have you ever been "lost in the moment," having no need or desire to justify or analyze?
b. The painting below is an image of God's creation in nature. Let us immerse ourselves inside its frame. What do we see, and how does it make us feel? In addition to vision and emotions, what other senses are aroused at seeing this glorious painting? As we meditate upon it, are we grandiose or small and humble? Does the Divine reside in the image for us? The goal is simply to describe in words as best as we can our reactions in order to heighten our awareness of the created world and perhaps lead us to a higher spiritual plane (as we can potentially experience in the subsequent chapters of this book).

Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Corcoran*, c. 1876–1877. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
See a larger version at:
https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.166428.html

# Unit II

## Chapters 2 and 3: Experiencing God in Reading, Studying, and Praying with Biblical, Rabbinic, and Liturgical Texts

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחָלַק מֵחָכְמָתוֹ לִירֵאָיו.

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shechalak meichochmato lirei-av.*

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Sovereign of the universe, who gave a portion of Your wisdom to those who stand in awe. (*Babylonian Talmud, B'rachot* 58b)

1. In chapter 2, writer Ilana Kurshan offers us a spiritual tool for embracing relief and gratitude in our morning prayers for the renewal of life each and every day. She takes us on her personal journey of obstacles and challenges to waking up anew each day with appreciation—from the trials of separation and isolation, parenting, and the limitations of our traditional prayers with regard to women's equality, to the urgency of mortal time.
   a. What are your obstacles and challenges to gratitude for the daily renewal of life?
   b. Kurshan refers to the following morning prayers and blessings:
      (1) *Modeh ani l'fanecha*—"I thank You"
      (2) *Elohai n'shamah shenatata bi*—"My God, the soul You have placed within me"
      (3) *Nisim Sheb'chol Yom*—Daily Miracles
      (4) Psalm 30

Imagine your personal blessing to God for the return of your body and soul each morning and complete this blessing formula: *Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam* . . . , "Blessed are You, *Adonai*, Sovereign of the universe, who . . . ." Alternatively, complete (1) or (2) above, based on your own experiences and the associations of your mind and heart.

2. In chapter 3, Rabbi Marc Katz offers that even while our sacred literature may not speak explicitly about the twenty-first century, it may still have something to teach us about that which is most pressing in our time. He imagines the builders of the Tower of Babel

> looking up to the clouds, wondering if God would keep the divine promise never to destroy the earth again. Despite the occasional bow in the sky, each instance of rain must have been a triggering experience. So, instead of ceding to their fears, they develop a plan: they will build a tower to heaven so they might pierce the clouds, letting the water out slowly and ensuring they would control the elements. Their desire to keep the chaos of the universe at bay is a universal feeling.[6]

6 Rabbi Marc Katz, p. 25.

a. Rabbi Katz's intuitive description of the collective anxiety of the Babel builders on the heels of an epic flood that destroyed almost all of humanity strikes the depths of our being and links us viscerally as well as religiously and morally to our sacred text. Horrific things happen to us in every generation. What guides you to overcome powerlessness and maintain your moral compass in crises? Is the Tower of Babel story helpful?
b. Each of us, like Rabbi Katz, will derive personal meaning from this text. Read and retell the story of Genesis 11:1–9. Play out the roles in your mind, in your heart, and aloud. Read it through the lens of the builders, the narrator, and God. Share with your co-learners. What interpretations resonate with you? What does the story imply about human nature? Is it a cautionary tale? Where is God in your understanding of the text and in your life right now?

# Unit III

## Chapters 9 and 11: Experiencing God in Relationships

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, הַשּׁוֹכֵן בְּקִהִלּוֹתֵינוּ.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, hashochein b'tocheinu bik'hiloteinu.*

Praised are You, Eternal Source of Love, who dwells among us in community.

1. In chapter 9, Rabbi Nicole Auerbach writes:

   > First, how can we create the conditions in which members of our community can be on both the giving and receiving ends of God's love? In other words, if we believe that at the heart of our yearning for God is the desire to feel seen, heard, and known, then how can we, as a sacred community, create that experience for one another? And second, if we believe that it is our role to make God's love, compassion, and justice manifest in this world, how can we create the structures that will allow us to gather together and harness the power to make it so?[7]

   a. Rabbi Auerbach suggests that we build small, movable "tents"—smaller versions of the *Mishkan*, the "desert sanctuary" of the Israelites—to create opportunities to experience those moments of connection in relationship with one another in the context of a divinely infused covenantal community. In those tents we can raise each other up by sharing and listening to each other's stories, listening to the perspectives of others without judgment, in order to grow in understanding of each other's deeply held values and beliefs and honoring them even if they are not our own. This is a sacred task with a sacred outcome.

*Listening Activity—Claremont Method:*[8] *Participants are invited to sit in a circle. The facilitator presents a contentious topical question, e.g., Who is to blame for national or natural disasters? Each person has two to three minutes to share. All others are silent and continue to be silent for a full minute between sharings. After all participants have had the opportunity to speak, the facilitator may summarize out loud the diverse viewpoints, without judgment. There are no follow-up questions and/or responses.*

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7 Rabbi Nicole Auerbach, p. 75.

8 This method is formally known as the Claremont McKenna College Commitment to Freedom of Expression, Viewpoint Diversity, and Effective Dialogue. It developed out of the hardening partisanship that threatens educational principles of freedom of expression, the search for truth, and openness to controversial ideas that challenge conventional assumptions. The method is based on training in the skills and capabilities of effective dialogue that draw on the free expression of different viewpoints, open critical inquiry, active listening, respectful debate, and facilitated communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills. To encourage true listening and understanding viewpoints of others, especially on controversial issues, dialogue participants are asked to wait in silence one full minute between individual sharings and generally to refrain from any type of response, including clarifying questions.

b. In the context of Rabbi Auerbach's "covenantal community," the facilitator might pose the following questions: How is God present in our suffering and in the suffering of others? In that painful space and time, how do we relate to God and to each other? Where and when do we feel God's love and compassion?

2. In chapter 11, Miriam Heller Stern, PhD, elevates the Claremont Method exercise to the next level. She admits that it takes enormous patience and humility to listen and not respond to the deeply held beliefs and convictions of others that are not our own and that cause us deep internal conflict:

> When I approach a conflict with conviction *and* humility, my goal is to gently move my adversary from a place of certainty about her own belief, to curiosity about mine, to caring about me and my moral stance. . . . We might apply this case to different views of God, beliefs about parenting, visions of justice, and opposing views on abortion, euthanasia, and many other issues that carry significant moral and political weight and impact our social fabric.[9]

a. Do you have a strong conviction right now about a spiritual or societal issue? Do you know someone who opposes you? If so, do you avoid the issue with that person or engage in a conversation? If the latter, can you describe that encounter and how it affects you and your convictions?
b. Stern challenges us to embrace conflict as a moral value. She offers us the biblical example of *eizer k'negdo*—what Adam must find in his *basherte*—as a "helper" and an "adversary" or "mirror," that is, both a complement and a reflection of our incomplete and flawed selves. Our Jewish interpretive paradigm of the "seventy faces to the Torah" truly asks us to train ourselves in the holding of conflicting narratives, without the need for resolution, as a path to emotional strength and resilience.

Consider biblical personae other than Adam and Eve who exhibit internal conflict and conflicting behavior toward others and God:[10]

– From the Torah: Abraham, Rebecca, Jacob and Esau, Judah, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Miriam
– From the Prophetic Writings: King David and the Prophet Jeremiah

This is an opportunity to share your knowledge of these biblical characters and their stories of conflict and to compare how they responded to those conflicts.

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9 Dr. Miriam Heller Stern, p. 93.

10 Consider these biblical personal dilemmas as examples: (1) God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac; (2) Rebecca favors her son Jacob over Esau; (3) Jacob deceives his twin Esau for the birthright; (4) Moses struggles with a divine call to leadership amid his personal challenges; (5) Aaron is ordered to be silent following the death of his two sons; (6) Miriam is overlooked as a leader of her people; (7) David's son Absalom rebels against his father; (8) Jeremiah is the reluctant prophet, spurned by the people.

# Unit IV

## Chapters 16 and 17: Experiencing God While Moving My Body

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, יוֹצֵר תֹּף וּמָחוֹל, שֶׁבָּרָא אוֹתִי בְּצַלְמוֹ וּבֵרַךְ אוֹתִי בְּגוּף זֶה וְנָפַח בְּאַפִּי נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים.

*Baruch atah, Adonai, yotzeir tof umachol shebara oti b'tzalmo uveireich oti b'guf zeh v'nafach b'api nishmat chayim.*

Praised are You, Creator of tambourine and dance,[11] who has made me in Your image—blessing me with this body and breathing into me Your sustaining spirit.

1. In chapter 16, Rabbi Susan Freeman writes:

> With Engaged Somatic Experiences,[12] we can experience our God-given body and soul-breath in harmony with our nature as creatures created in the image of God. The awareness that our physical bodies are infused with divine soul-breath and imprinted with godliness grants us access to an intimate relationship with the Holy One: we are able to perceive all of life as sacred.[13]

Freeman assures us:

> Openness to movement and change within and beyond the limits of our bodies presents us with opportunities to connect with our own godliness and to fully experience the Holy One's love.[14]

a. Yonatan Arnon, rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, dancer, and founder of "MoveMeant—Embodying Sacred Texts," suggests a path to bring us into closer relationship with the Divine by opening up unconscious movement of our bodies. Movement can be inspired by liturgical music, the noises in nature, and the chanting of biblical texts. From the Bible we learn that Noah and Abraham both "walked" with God.[15] Moses sang.[16] Miriam danced and sang.[17] The Israelites walked for forty years, attempting to absorb their God into every fiber of their being in each and every step.

   Without the use of mirrors, book in hand, or any accessories to distract us and jumpstart our brains in motion, invite yourself to dance, hike, sing, or just settle in, sitting or laying prone, listening to music or chanting, and let

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11 Psalm 150:4.

12 Rabbi Freeman defines "somatic experiences" as an umbrella concept to encompass a breadth of bodily felt (somatic) sensations that include and go beyond the choreographed or improvised movement phrases associated with artistic dance performance—indeed, any movement infused with a conscious, or even subconscious, awareness of our human embodied condition, such as, yoga, running, hiking, mindful walking, martial arts, biking, rowing, swimming, and so on.

13 Rabbi Susan Freeman, p. 137.

14 Rabbi Susan Freeman, p. 140.

15 Genesis 6:9 and Genesis 17:1-2, respectively.

16 Exodus 15:1–19; Deuteronomy 32:1–43.

17 Exodus 15:20–21.

any part of your body move without pause to the limit of your comfort—fingers, hands, feet, head, upper body, etc. When movement has ended, take a deep breath. If you wish to share in group:

– What were you aware of during the movement? Gravity? Space?
– Was there a sense of being part of a larger existence in any way?
– Were there godlike or even divine qualities in your experience?

b. Rabbi Freeman also quotes Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi:

> So first I [God] will make Earth. Then I will form the Person out of My Name, *Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh*. I will make *Yud* [י] the head, *Heh* [ה] the shoulders and arms, *Vav* [ו] the spine, and *Heh* [ה] the pelvis and legs. And then I will blow into its nostrils and it will become conscious.[18]

The human body is, by virtue of God's name, united with the Divine. It is upon us to seek out their meeting point and to feel the joy, elation, and exaltation that dwells within our bodies.

– When have you felt your body turn into a vehicle of joy?
– When have you felt your body turn into a vehicle for elevation?

2. In chapter 17, Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD, writes:

> God, in the purest meaning of the first narrative, did not "create" the world, but "ordered" it. . . . I imagine God's joy over the beauty and majesty of the emerging patterns of the large and small, intertwined in the new order. I imagine a sense of care for the vulnerable balance of life, of pride in the sheer beauty (movements, shapes, colors, smells) of Creation, of anxious hope for its well-being, of connection . . . I imagine God to have similar emotions to mine when I am ordering my apartment. I care, I create beauty, I am proud . . . I love to think that God loved touching the matter; I love to think that God loved seeing the patterns of beauty unfolding.[19]

a. The above are metaphors for a God who parallels what the human body thinks, feels, and does. The metaphors are a reflection of the beauty, love, comfort, and appreciation the author experiences creating new patterns out of matter.

– Do you share the author's feelings? Why or why not?
– If not, how else could the biblical narrative of the "ordering" of Creation become for you an awe-inspiring narrative?

b. As the author creates order from chaos in her apartment, we reflect on the creative powers of humanity, harkening back to an example from our sacred text: the building of the *Mishkan*.[20] In the Book of Exodus, it is God who crafts the order and contents of its construction. It is also God who endows

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18 Rabbi Susan Freeman, p. 138.
19 Rabbi Sonja K. Pilz, PhD, p. 148.
20 Exodus 35:1–38:20

*chochmat lev*[21] to the biblical artisan Bezalel, symbol of human potential and creativity, who creates order from chaos in the Book of Exodus. With the help of Bezalel, the people can sanctify space and time. Rabbi Pilz tells us that when we give order to our homes, we are sanctifying space and time. We make space for God in the space of our home.

– Cleaning our house is a ritual. Ritual is a way of sanctifying time and space. What rituals fulfill that task for you? In your home? Out of your home? What ritual elements elevate the spaces in which you dwell?
– In what spaces do you perceive God's presence viscerally and spiritually?

21 *Chochmat lev* is a creative flow that comes with a "wise heart," an inspired heart, an open heart, a heart with space for the possibility of the unknown to unfold within it.

# Unit V

## Chapters 15 and 19: Experiencing God through My Body

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַמֵּכִין מִצְעֲדֵי גָבֶר.

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, hameichin mitzadei gaver.*

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes firm my steps. (*Daily Miracles*, Morning Liturgy)

1. In chapter 15, Cantor Evan Kent describes the emergence of personal, authentic prayer into his life during his recuperation from a serious illness:

> A search for the holy and immanent becomes a part of my daily life. I begin a process of integrating prayer into the everyday beyond those moments standing on the bimah. If there is a solitary blessing in contracting pneumonia and the major surgery that followed, this is it. The disease, the bacteria speeding through my bloodstream have opened my soul, my heart, my healing body to what a vibrant prayer life could be like. My personal path to a prayerful life didn't begin in the abundance of nature, the vastness of the universe and the heavenly bodies, or the birth of a child. My initiation into a life where prayer is real and formidable was initiated by microscopic bacteria invading my blood and lungs.[22]

Cantor Kent was inspired by Abraham Joshua Heschel's "depth theology," which moves us beyond the traditional ways of experiencing God through ritual, sacred text, and the fixed prayer book to our innermost being, where our thoughts and feelings are often left unarticulated and undefined. Cantor Kent's theology of self-awareness and gratitude was born out of physical suffering and subsequent healing. He found a deep connection between the successful workings of his body, especially in regard to the parts needed for running and singing, with other humans who enabled these successes and with God, who assuredly had a hand in giving him the courage to reclaim again his life's purposes.

a. Do we need to be in an intentional body practice (e.g., yoga, dance, physical exercise) to be grateful for our bodies? Consider the reasons our liturgy provides morning blessings attuned to the workings of our physical beings.[23] Might those blessings support us in focusing on our body in its functionality and as a source for the experience of the Divine?
b. What is your experience with physical pain and suffering? Has God played a role in your physical and spiritual healing? If yes, when did God appear—before, during, or after your ordeal? If not, what or who scaffolds your journey? (Here, consider Cantor Kent's relationship with his voice coach.) If there is only pain and suffering, but no healing, where and how might we meet God? Remember that your personal story can lift up someone else to hope, courage, and resilience.

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22 Cantor Evan Kent, p. 129.

23 This conversation is also an opportunity to review the morning blessings: *Modeh Ani*, *Asher Yatzar*, *Elohai N'shamah*, etc.

2. In chapter 19, Rabbi Myriam Klotz chronicles their journey from an Orthodox life to pursuing a non-halachic spiritual practice for the sake of reclaiming both God and their authentic identity as a queer individual. Their escape from exclusion and isolation to a place of compassion and divine encounter ironically was inspired by the solitude and quiet of a desert town in Israel. Re-immersing into Judaism, they reconstituted their connection with God through the name of God as a quiet, female voice revealing Herself in our world—the *Bat Kol*—and the silent and mindful practices of meditation and yoga.

> The sacred silence inside me merged with the great silence of the life of the natural world. I would find words and could craft poems and narratives that insisted on the fact that *I was here. We were here. We were here, mysterious, flowing, vast, and unconditioned.* Looking back, I see that time was sacred time: I lived in dialogue, contemplatively, mostly silently, and in an intimate relationship with what I have referred to as the *Bat Kol*. . . .
>
> The *Bat Kol* makes Her Self known to me in silence, somatic sensations, thoughts, ideas, and flashes of insight. Those flashes mark moments of my awareness of the divine becoming. I am a receiver; all of who I am is necessary to receive the silent voice in which the *Bat Kol* speaks.[24]

a. Are there Jewish beliefs or practices that make you feel alienated and excluded—can you name them? If so, how have you responded to these challenges?
b. Rabbi Klotz implies that the God Who Has Reclaimed Them in their adult life embraces them wholly and in full acceptance of their identity and spirituality. Have you ever experienced a feeling of isolation because of your unique identity? How can Rabbi Klotz's narrative be of help?

24 Rabbi Myriam Klotz, p. 170.

# Unit VI

## Chapter 20: Beyond Body, Soul, and Mind

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַיֵּשׁ וְהָאַיִן.

*Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, hayeish v'ha-ayin.*

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Sovereign of the universe, what-is and no-thing-ness.

In chapter 20, Rhonda Karlton Rosen reflects on Buddhist teachings as a tool for growing our Jewish faith and our uniquely Jewish connection to the immanent and transcendent Divine Mystery. How do we begin to make space for God and Godliness? Rosen asks, "Our personal relationship with the Divine also creates an immediate obligation: How do we begin to make space for Her in every aspect of our lives? In this moment, in this setting, with these people, how can I contain all this as an active element of my awareness?"[25]

How do we let go of our habitual behaviors and reactions that more often than not hurt ourselves and others? According to Rosen, "Careful and kind attention can untangle the knots of perceptual habits. With deliberate use of attention, we can begin to pull apart the factors of habitual reactivity and create a possibility for change."[26]

Like many of the other authors in this collection, Rosen is seeking a heightened self-awareness toward a greater purpose for humanity and a relationship with God. She acknowledges the path as complex and full of obstacles generated by our internal biases and fears. She entreats us to take a look at our behavior and our intentions before we can even begin this process of deconstructing the unconsciously, or consciously, crafted defense systems that we utilize for self-protection. Many times, these defenses do not serve us well. We need to take on the obligation to cultivate patterns of thought, speech, and action, which lead us closer to loving ourselves, loving God, and loving others.

Rosen offers a curriculum of learning consisting of five elements of practice, to enable us to work with the obstacles that are insubstantial by their very nature. By doing so, we make the Divine, who is already present, be known. We can let that relationship govern the kindness and humility we bring toward all relationships.

Below is an outline of five elements from the text, with a teaching from the author. Participants may divide into small groups corresponding to each idea.

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25 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 187.
26 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 185.

– Read the quote, define the "idea," take the time to digest the author's intention, and name personal examples (i.e., the way in which you might apply this idea to yourself).
– When the whole group reconvenes, each group (in the author's order) reports on their step, in order to put the puzzle together. In this way, we might more personally internalize the fullness of Rosen's theology as receivers, as practitioners, and as potential teachers.

1. Mindfulness: Being awake and attentive to ourselves and what is happening outside of ourselves, often achieved through meditation, gives us a chance to become aware of our perceptual biases and let go of what no longer works. Then there can continually arise a new understanding, a new awareness of what was previously outside the field of awareness.

> It seems to me now that all those years of sitting in silence have given me some access to the stirrings of my soul. After many years of doing this emotional and spiritual work outside of Judaism, I returned to Judaism because my soul would not let me do otherwise. My eyes would become wet with tears whenever I entered a synagogue and heard Hebrew chanted. . . . I cannot explain why I was so moved by my Jewish roots. I cannot explain why I responded to the internal urging the way I did. Why do we ask God to "open my lips so I can pray" (at the beginning of the *Amidah*)? What even moves us to ask this?[27]

2. Concentration and Absorption: Directing our attention to a singular focus allows for everything else to fall away. We can hone our capacity to be receptive this way.

> In our Jewish vocabulary, this practice might be a Shabbat practice. I can practice ceasing to work; I learn to value comfort and ease, to let go, and to be receptive. Let the eyes receive light. Let the ears receive sound. Let the heart be open and receptive. . . . The practice of Shabbat becomes an obligation. We keep the Sabbath religiously. And we are taught that the Sabbath will keep us.[28]

3. Wisdom and Faith:

> Letting go of the familiar way of perceiving the world opens us up to not knowing, to silence, to simply being. This can scare us. This is where faith gets cultivated. I can rest on the ground of nothingness, no-thing-ness, for a moment, as I continue to just sit here. I learn to have faith in the process of letting go. Faith is a cultivated and direct experience. It becomes the anchor in the endless sea of unknowing. Wisdom knows awe. It knows that all is temporary; all is folly (Ecclesiastes 1). Faith helps us to just sit here and know what we now know. And then perception re-forms around a new temporary truth. With a honed intention, we move closer to living well, living with the knowledge of our relationship with eternity and our responsibility to make what the Buddhists call wholesome choices.[29]

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27 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 181.
28 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 184.
29 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 186.

4. Learning with Love and Humility*:*

> We have four kinds of relationships with God. One is no greater than the other, and we move through them throughout the day or month or year, depending on what is the most helpful or necessary at the moment. There is the relationship of lower-level awe—*I better do the right thing or I will get smoted*. This relationship has us working to determine what is the next right thing to do. It can move us toward acts of *t'shuvah*.
>
> The second relationship is lower-level love—*I am loved*. This is the love that fills us completely. It is the love we frequently yearn for. This relationship is especially sweet on Shabbat. If we make even the smallest opening, we are filled.
>
> The next kind of relationship is higher-level love—the kind of love that is simply available in the universe. This kind of love is not personal. It is sublime.
>
> And then there is the relationship of higher-level awe—the Hubble telescope perspective—*I am a wee, small part of the universe*. This relationship leads us to humility. It is the largest container, which puts all my petty concerns in perspective. It eliminates everything but faith and awe.[30]

5. A Story from Our Tradition: So often we are caught up in judgment and we forget we always have a way to return to a relationship with the Divine. In the story of Cain and Abel, God warns Cain that "sin (*yetzer hara*) ever crouches at the door" (Genesis 4:7). Still, ostensibly in jealousy, Cain murders his brother, Abel. We are frequently taught that Cain is condemned to wander the earth, scorned but alive. There are other, helpful retellings:

> The *Zohar* has a loving and compassionate view of Cain, which is essential. We will mess up and we will learn something new, over and over again. We consistently need to keep relearning and refining what we keep forgetting. We continually need to practice *t'shuvah*. We are taught that *t'shuvah* was put into place even before Creation. The cure for the inevitable wounding was put in place before the beginning.[31]

> Rabbi Yitzchak said, "Come and see: As Cain was killing Abel, he did not know how his soul would expire, as the Companions have established. At that moment the Blessed Holy One cursed him, and he wandered the world, everywhere rejected, till finally he slapped himself on the head and returned to the presence of his God."[32]

The following quote encapsulates Rosen's spiritual objective, which can also be the spiritual outcome of this adult education unit:

> When we pray and study, we will find that we are assisted. It turns out that I am not the center of the universe. You are not the center of the universe. We live in relationship to all that is. It is a dynamic, living relationship. The Divine Mystery connects the immanent presence to the transcendent, without a single moment of separation.[33]

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30 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 188.
31 Babylonian Talmud, *N'darim* 39b.
32 Daniel Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 7 (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 306; *see* Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 189.
33 Rhonda Karlton Rosen, p. 190.