

Rav Kook Torah

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How to Serve God in Joy

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"Because you failed to serve the Eternal your God with joy and contentment..." (D'varim 28:47)

Rav Kook was once asked: how can we be inspired to serve God with joy and enthusiasm?

In his response, Rav Kook wrote:

It is difficult to properly explain this fundamental aspect of serving God in a letter. The principal method for motivating people is by dedicating time to thorough study of the spiritual [non-legal] parts of the Torah, and not let it be relegated to haphazard reading. Through this study, the soul's inner light shines, and a spirit of happiness and strength invigorates those who sincerely seek out the truth.

Elevating the Universe

Nonetheless, I will share with you one central principle - although this too cannot be fully understood without serious study and reflection. Still, it will provide a 'handle' for your desire to deepen your love of God

and experience the light of our holy Torah.

It is clear that if a person was presented with the opportunity to benefit the entire world, even the most self-centered individual would act happily and with all of his strength. Fatigue and weariness are the result of lack of belief in the extent of the good that we perform for all of the universe through our Torah study, mitzvot, Divine service, and refinement of character traits.

For this reason, God enlightened us with the words of the holiest tzadikim, masters of the Kabbala. They deepen our understanding of the true significance of our service of God and clarify how it uplifts all of creation. Nonetheless, we need to bring this idea closer to the intellect so that the motivation will be strong and the joy well-founded.

The Collective Soul of the Universe

One attains this awareness by contemplating the spiritual unity of the universe. That is to say, we need to recognize that the light of each individual soul is connected to the collective soul of all existence. All created things draw the light of their perfection from this collective soul. We have the power to increase the light in our souls through Torah study, mitzvot, prayer, and character refinement. We need to be aware that whenever we enlighten our own souls, we are benefiting not just

ourselves but the entire universe, bestowing perfection and life to all things.

Through us, the righteous gain greater power in their holy service. The evil of the wicked is mitigated to some degree, and they experience thoughts of penitence. Even the animals are ennobled according to their level. The noble holiness provided by one soul that truly cares about all of existence helps refine and purify even those creatures that tend to damage. And it certainly adds dazzling light to the lofty splendor of the souls, and throughout the spiritual worlds, boundless in their beauty and sanctity.

All this is proper and valid for any individual belonging to the holy nation of Israel; and is even more appropriate for those who have the privilege of dwelling in the holy land... 