

FOR THERE IS NO RUNG OF BEING  
ON WHICH WE CANNOT FIND  
THE HOLINESS OF GOD  
EVERYWHERE AND AT ALL TIMES

# The Rung of God and Man

## TWO KINDS OF FAITH

Why do we say: “Our God and the God of our fathers”?

There are two kinds of people who believe in God. One believes because he has taken over the faith of his fathers, and his faith is strong. The other has arrived at faith through thinking and studying. The difference between them is this: The advantage of the first is that, no matter what arguments may be brought against it, his faith cannot be shaken; his faith is firm because it was taken over from his fathers. But there is one flaw in it: he has faith only in response to the command of man, and he has acquired it without studying and thinking for himself. The advantage of the second is that, because he found God through much thinking, he has arrived at a faith of his own. But here too there is a flaw: it is easy to shake his faith by refuting it through evidence. But he who unites both kinds of faith is invincible. And so we say, “Our God” with reference to our studies, and “God of our fathers” with an eye to tradition.

The same interpretation has been given to our saying, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,” and not “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” for this indicates that Isaac and Jacob did not merely take over the tradition of Abraham; they themselves searched for God.

## SEEING AND BELIEVING

Question: It is written: "And Israel saw the great hand," and further on it is written: "...and they believed in the Lord, and in His servant Moses." Why is this said? The question as to whether or not one believes can only be put while one does not as yet "see."

Answer: You are mistaken. It is only then that the true question can be put. Seeing the great hand does not mean that faith can be dispensed with. It is only after "seeing" that one realizes what the lack of faith means, and feels how very much one needs faith. The seeing of the great hand is the beginning of faith in that which one cannot "see."

## THE BEGINNING OF TEACHING

Rabbi Bunam began teaching with these words: "We thank You, who are blessed and who are the source of blessing, that you are manifest and hidden." Then he continued: "A fearless man must feel God as he feels the place on which he stands. And just as he cannot imagine himself without a place to stand on, so he must in all simplicity grow aware of God who is the Place of the world, and comprises it. But at the same time he must know that He is the hidden life which fills the world."

## EVERYWHERE

God says to man as he said to Moses: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet"—put off the habitual which encloses your foot and you will recognize that the place on which you happen to be standing at this moment is holy ground. For there is no rung of being on which we cannot find the holiness of God everywhere and at all times.

## THE WAY IN WHICH GOD HIDES

God hides in two ways. One way is that God hides so that it is very difficult to find him and yet he who knows that God is hiding from him can advance toward him and find him. The other way is that God hides from a man the fact that he is hiding and, since the seeker knows so little about God, he cannot find him. It is this that is referred to in the words: "I shall hide, hide." God hides the fact that he is hiding, and then those from whom he is hiding do not know him—the hidden one.

## THE SHEPHERD IS THERE

It is written: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd." This does not mean that the shepherd is not there. The shepherd is always there. But sometimes he hides, and then he is indeed not there to the sheep, because they do not see him.

## BEYOND TIME

The understanding of man is not great enough to grasp the fact that God is beyond time. But you must understand that time exists only because we do not grasp it, only because our understanding is small. For the greater our understanding, the more time is on the wane. In a dream we live seventy years and discover, on awakening, that it was a quarter of an hour. In our life, which passes like a dream, we live seventy years and then we waken to a greater understanding which shows us that it was a quarter of an hour. With our small understanding we can never grasp what we will know with the greater. Perfect understanding is beyond time.

When the Messiah had learned what he learned since the creation of the world, and suffered what he suffered, God said to him: "Thou art My son, this day I have begotten thee."

### WHO KNOWS ONE?

This is what Rabbi Moshe of Kobryn said concerning the first question in the game of riddles, sung at the end of the Passover Haggadah, “Who knows one? I know one”:

“Who knows one?” said he. “Who can know the One? For even the seraphim ask: ‘Where is the place of His glory?’ And yet—‘I know one.’ For, as the sage says: ‘Where shall I find you?... And where shall I not find you!’ And the seraphim too reply: ‘The whole earth is full of His glory’ By his works within me, I know the One.”

### THE STRONG THIEF

Every lock has its key which fits into and opens it. But there are strong thieves who know how to open locks without keys. They break the lock. So every mystery in the world can be unriddled by the particular kind of meditation fitted to it. But God loves the thief who breaks the lock open: I mean, the man who breaks his heart for God.

### TWO KINDS OF FEAR

Question: When they stood at Mount Sinai, the people said to Moses: “Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.” And Moses answered: “Fear not.” He went on to say that God had come “that His fear may be before you, that ye sin not.” Is not that a contradiction?

Answer: “Fear not”—this means: this fear of yours, the fear of death, is not the fear God wants of you. He wants you to fear him, he wants you to fear his remoteness, and not to fall into sin which removes you from him.

## OUR DISGRACE

Our disgrace is that we fear another besides God. This is what was said of Jacob in the words: "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and he was distressed." We must be distressed because of our fear of Esau.

## THE SOLITARY TREE

When I look at the world, it sometimes seems to me as if every man were a tree in the wilderness, and God had no one in his world save him alone, and he had none he could turn to, save God alone.

## A MAN ON EARTH

Question: Why is it written: "In the day that God created *a man* on earth," and not "in the day that God created *man* on earth"?

Answer: You shall serve your Creator as if there were only one man in the world, only you yourself.

## THE DIVIDING WALL

In the Scriptures we read: "I stood between the Lord and you." The "I" stands between God and us. When a man says "I" and presumes to use his Maker's word, he is shutting himself off from him. But there is no dividing wall before him who sacrifices his "I." For of him it is written: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." When my "I" comes to belong to my beloved, then his desire is toward me.

### WHO MAY BE CALLED MAN?

In the Scriptures we read: “When any man of you bringeth an offering unto the Lord...” Only he who brings himself to God as an offering may be called man.

### THE PUPIL

Rabbi Pinhas said: “Ever since I began giving true service to my Maker, I have not tried to gain anything, but only taken what God gave me. It is because the pupil is dark that it absorbs every ray of light.”

### HOLY DESPAIR

In the psalm we read: “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart by day?”

As long as I take counsel in my soul, there must be sorrow in my heart all day. Only when I know of no further counsel that can help me, and I give up taking counsel, and know of no other help but God, will help be vouchsafed me.

### IT IS I

Question: It is written: “I am JHWH, thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt” Why does it not say: “I am JHWH, thy God, who created heaven and earth”?

Answer: “Heaven and earth!” Then man might have said, “Heaven—that’s too much for me!” So God said to man: “I am the one who fished you out of the mud. Now you come here and listen to me!”

### THE SHADOW

Man himself is the source of all his troubles, for the light of God pours over him eternally But through his all-too-

bodily existence man comes to cast a shadow, so that the light cannot reach him.

### TWO KINDS OF LOVE FOR GOD

There are two kinds of love: the love of a man for his wife, which should manifest itself in secret and not where there are spectators, for this love can be consummated only in a place apart from other beings; and there is the love for one's brothers and sisters and children, a love which does not require secrecy.

And there are two kinds of love for God: the love spent in learning and praying and fulfilling the commandments, which should be shown in silence and not in the presence of others, lest it tempt to glory and pride; and the love shown in the company of other human beings, when one hears and speaks, gives and takes, and, in one's secret heart, clings to God and never ceases dwelling upon him. And this love is on a higher rung than the other, and concerning it, we read: "Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea and none would despise me."

### TWO KINDS OF GOD'S LOVE

There are two kinds of love: one man loves whatever his clever son does and says, and boasts about his doing clever things and speaking clever words; the other loves his son for himself, no matter what he may say or do.

It is the same with the love of God for man. When a tried and proven man keeps the commandments and does good works wisely and well, God loves what he does and is present in all that he does, and thus the outer being of the universe is bound to God. But when the tried and proven man clings to God with his own being, then God loves him even when he does not work wisely and well, but goes his way with a simple mind and clings to God. God loves him



just for that reason. And so the inner being of the universe is lifted to God.

### MOLTEN GODS

It is written: “Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.”

When you think of God, you should really think of him, and not of a molten god which you have made in your own image.

### WE SHAPE A HUMAN FORM FOR GOD

Our sages said: “Know what is above you...” The rabbi of Apt expounded this saying as follows:

“‘Know what is above you.’ And what is this that is above you? The prophet Ezekiel said: ‘And upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above.’ How can this be said of God? For is it not written: ‘To whom then will ye liken **Me**, that I should be his equal?’ But the truth of the matter is that the likeness as the appearance of a man’ is wrought by us. It is the form we shape when we serve with true and fervent hearts. Such service shapes a human form for our Creator, to whom no one is like or equal; it shapes him, blessed be he and blessed be his name, in the semblance of man. When a man is charitable and gives a service of love, he contributes to the form of God’s right hand. And when a man fights in the ranks of God and drives evil away, he contributes to the form of his left hand. He who is above you on the throne—his shape is your work.”

### WITH GOD

You must know that every movement you make is bound up with the will of the Creator. That is why it is written: “Noah walked with God.” For every movement is made through the impulse given by God. Noah clung to God with

such very great devotion that it seemed to him that, whenever he walked, God was moving his feet. At every step it seemed to him that God was facing him and guiding him as a father teaches his little son to walk, and when the father moves further away from him, the child knows it is for his own good.

### SIGNS

This whole world is a cloak for the lowest rung of holiness, for its feet, as it were. As it is written: "And the earth is my footstool." God limits the godliness he has in infinity, and narrows it down to the focus of the material world in which man exists. And there he assigns every man his thought and word and deed according to the day, the place, and the person, and hides therein the signs to lead men to his service.

And so a man should immerse himself in the task of understanding the signs which are cloaked in thought and word and deed and so given to him in particular, in his work and his affairs, and in everything God appoints for him day by day.

### CONCERNING SECRECY

Sometimes a man lies in bed, and the household thinks he is asleep, but he is spending this hour in solitude with his Maker, blessed be he. If the eyes of his understanding can always behold his Maker as if he were another human being—that is a very high rung. And take this to heart if at all times you dwell in pure thoughts, then the Maker too will look at you as though he were a human being.

### FAITH

Faith is a very strong thing, and if a man has faith and a simplicity that does not rationalize, he will be found worthy of reaching the rung of grace which is even higher than that of holy wisdom. He will be vouchsafed great and great over-

whelming grace in God in very blissful silence, until he will be able to bear the greatness of this silence no longer, and will cry aloud out of the fullness of his soul.

# The Rung of Prayer

## LET EVERYONE CRY OUT TO GOD

Let everyone cry out to God and lift his heart up to him, as if he were hanging by a hair, and a tempest were raging to the very heart of heaven, and he were at a loss for what to do, and there were hardly time to cry out. It is a time when no counsel, indeed, can help a man and he has no refuge save to remain in his loneliness and lift his eyes and his heart up to God, and cry out to him. And this should be done at all times, for in the world a man is in great danger.

## THE SECRET PRAYER

This is how the words of prayer: “Hear us, when we call for help, hear our cries, Thou who knowest what is hidden,” are expounded:

We do not even know how we are supposed to pray. All we do is call for help because of the need of the moment. But what the soul intends is spiritual need, only we are not able to express what the soul means. That is why we do not merely ask God to hear our call for help, but also beg him, who knows what is hidden, to hear the silent cry of the soul.

## IN EXILE

A king's son rebelled against his father and was banished from the sight of his face. After a time, the king was moved to pity for his fate and bade messengers go in search of him. It was long before one of the messengers found him—far from home. He was at a village inn, dancing barefoot and in a torn shirt in the midst of drunken peasants. The courtier bowed and said: "Your father has sent me to ask you what you desire. Whatever it may be, he is prepared to grant your wish." The prince began to weep. "Oh," said he, "if only I had warm clothing and a pair of stout shoes!"

See, that is how we whimper for the small needs of the hour and forget that the Glory of God is in exile!

## FALSE PRAYER

He who prays in sorrow because of the bleakness which burdens his spirit, and thinks he is praying in the fear of God, or he who prays in joy because of the radiance in his spirit, and thinks he is praying in the love of God—his prayers are no good at all. For his fear is the burden of sadness, and his love is nothing but empty joy.

## INTO THE WORD

You should utter words as though heaven were opened within them and as though you did not put the word into your mouth, but as though you entered into the word.

## OFFERING ONESELF UP

He who utters the word "Lord," and in doing so prepares to say "of the world," is not speaking as he should. At the moment he is saying "Lord," he must only think of offering himself up to the Lord, even if his soul perished in the Lord and he were not able to add the word "world." It should be enough for him to have been able to say "Lord."

## EXCHANGE OF STRENGTH

When a Jew is about to say: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the world,” and prepares to utter the first word, the word “blessed,” he shall do so with all his strength, so that he will have no strength left to say “art thou.” And this is the meaning of the verse in the Scriptures: “But they that wait for the Lord shall exchange their strength.” What we are really saying is: “Our Father in heaven, I am giving you all the strength that is within me in that very first word; now will you, in exchange, give me an abundance of new strength, so that I can go on with my prayer.”

## GOD SINGS

The psalm reads: “For singing to our God is good.”

It is good if man can so bring it about that God sings within him.

## THE RIGHT KIND OF ALTAR

It is written: “An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me... and if thou make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones, for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast profaned it.”

The altar of earth is the altar of silence, which pleases God beyond all else. But if you do make an altar of words, do not hew and chisel them, for such artifice would profane it.

## DISTURBANCE FROM WITHIN

To commune with your Maker in solitude and silence, to recite psalms and pray to him—this it is good to do with your whole heart, until you are overwhelmed with weeping and weep to God as a child weeps to its father. But to weep according to plan in the midst of prayer—that is unworthy!

He who does so can no longer say what he says with a whole heart, and the truly great weeping will not overwhelm him. Even thoughts about prayer are like “alien thoughts” which hinder the soul from fixing itself wholly upon God.

There are people who can utter words of prayer with true fervor, so that the words shine like a precious stone whose radiance shines of itself. Then again there are people whose words are nothing but a window that has no light of its own, but only lets the light in and shines for that reason.

### PRAYING AND EATING

Question: “Ye shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless thy bread.” Why is “ye” written first, and later “thy”?

Answer: To serve—that means to pray. When a man prays, and even if he does this alone in his room, he shall first unite with all of Israel; thus, in every true prayer, it is the community that is praying. But when one eats, and even if it is at a table full of people, each man eats for himself.

### VALID PRAYER

A prayer which is not spoken in the name of all Israel is no prayer at all.

### ALL THE MELODIES

Every people has its own melody, and no people sings the melody of another. But Israel sings all the melodies, in order to bring them to God. So, in the “Section of Praise,” all the creatures that live on the earth, and all the birds, utter each his own song. But Israel makes a song out of all of their songs, in order to bring them to God.

## OF THE POWER OF THE WORD

When you speak, cherish the thought of the secret of the voice and the word, and speak in fear and love, and remember that the world of the word finds utterance through your mouth. Then you will lift the word.

Remember that you are only a vessel, and that your thought and your word are worlds that spread out: the world of the word—that is the Divine Presence which, when it is uttered, desires something from the world of thought. And when you have drawn the light of God into your thought and word, pray that something of the abundance and blessing from the world of thought may pour over the world of the word. Then you too will receive what you need. That is why we say: “Let us find you in our prayers!” God can be found in our very prayer.

## HE IS YOUR PSALM

In the Scriptures we read: “He is thy psalm and He is thy God.”

He is your psalm and he also is your God. The prayer a man says, that prayer, of itself, is God. It is not as if you were asking something of a friend. Your friend is different from you and your words are different. It is not so in prayer, for prayer unites the principles. When a man who is praying thinks his prayer is something apart from God, he is like a suppliant to whom the king grants his request. But he who knows that prayer in itself is God is like the king’s son who takes whatever he needs from the stores of his father.



# The Rung of Heaven and Earth

## TWO WORLDS

The other nations, too, believe that there are two worlds. They, too, say, “in the world to come.” The difference is this: they think that the two are separate and severed, but Israel professes that the two worlds are essentially one and shall, indeed, become one.

## TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN

When Rabbi Enoch had said the verse of the psalm: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth hath He given to the children of men,” he paused and then went on to say: “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord’—you see, they are already of a heavenly character. ‘But the earth hath He given to the children of men’—so that they might make of it something heavenly.”

## IN THE DUST

Question: Why do people always weep when they say: “Man, his origin is of the dust and his end is in the dust”? If man sprang from gold and turned to dust, it would be proper to weep, but not if he returns whence he has come.

Answer: The origin of the world is dust, and man has been placed in it that he may raise the dust to spirit. But his end is dust—and time and again it is the end where he fails, and everything crumbles into dust.

### THE ZADDIKIM THAT BUILD

Question: How are we to interpret the words of our sages: “Every zaddik in whose day the Temple is not built, is no zaddik at all”? That would mean that all the zaddikim who have lived since the destruction of the Temple were not zaddikim.

Answer: The zaddikim are always building at the upper sanctuary. The zaddik who does not do his share in the building is no zaddik at all.

### THE FIRST LIGHT

Before the soul enters the air of this world, it is conducted through all the worlds. Last of all, it is shown the first light which once—when the world was created—illuminated all things, and which God removed when mankind grew corrupt. Why is the soul shown this light? So that, from that hour on, it may yearn to attain the light, and approach it rung by rung in its life on earth. And those who reach it, the zaddikim—into them the light enters, and out of them it shines into the world again. That is the reason why it was hidden.

### LOOKING AT THE WORLD

As the hand held before the eye hides the tallest mountain, so this small earthly life hides from our gaze the vast radiance and secrets of which the world is full, and whoever can take life from before his eyes, as one takes away one's hand, will see the great radiance within the world.

## IN THE MIDST OF THE GARDEN

It is written: "The tree of life also in the midst of the garden." Whenever man studies or prays, he should think that he is in the garden of paradise, where there is no envy and no lust and no pride, and he will surely be safe from distraction. But how can he think in this way, since he knows that he is in this world and among people he is acquainted with? This is how: when man studies or prays with reverence and devoutness begotten of love, and fastens and binds his spirit to God and remembers that nothing is void of him and without him, but that everything is filled with life granted by the Creator, then, in all he sees, he sees the living power of the Creator and hears his living voice. That is the meaning of the words: "The tree of life in the midst of the garden." He who clings to the life of God is in the midst of the garden.

## TWO DOORS

Man is always passing through two doors: out of this world and into the next, and out and in again.

## THE LADDER

The souls descended from the realm of heaven to earth, on a long ladder. Then it was taken away. Now, up there, they are calling home the souls. Some do not budge from the spot, for how can one get to heaven without a ladder? Others leap and fall and leap again, and give up. But there are those who know very well that they cannot achieve it, but try and try over and over again until God catches hold of them and pulls them up.

## EVERYTHING LEAVES TRACES

Man is a ladder placed on the earth and the top of it touches heaven. And all his movements and doings and words leave traces in the upper world.

## ON THE EARTH

If a man of Israel has himself firmly in hand, and stands solidly on the earth, then his head reaches up to heaven.

## ABRAHAM AND HIS GUESTS

Concerning Abraham, whom angels visited, the Scriptures say: “And he stood over them and they did eat.” Why is this said in the Scriptures? It is not customary for the host who does not eat with his guests to stand over them while they eat. Now this is what is meant by these words in the Scriptures: The angels have their virtues and flaws, and men have their virtues and flaws. The virtue of angels is that they cannot deteriorate, and their flaw is that they cannot improve. Man’s flaw is that he can deteriorate, and his virtue that he can improve. But a man who practices hospitality in the true sense of the word acquires the virtues of his guests. Thus Abraham acquired the virtue of angels who never deteriorate. And so he was over and above them.

## TO WALK HIDDEN

It is written: “And to walk hidden with thy God.” You know that angels stand. Ceaselessly they stand, each on his own rung, but we move, we move from rung to rung. For the angels are not garmented in flesh; they cannot remain hidden in the course of their service and no matter on what rung they stand, they are always manifest. But the son of man on earth is clothed with the stuff of earth and can hide within this body of his. And so—hidden from sight—he can move from rung to rung.

## MAN'S ADVANTAGE

Why does God demand sacrifice of man and not of the angels? That of the angels would be purer than the service of man could ever be. But what God desires is not the deed but the preparation. The holy angels cannot prepare themselves; they can only do the deed. Preparation is the task of man who is caught in the thicket of tremendous obstacles, and must free himself. There is the advantage of the works of man.

## AGAINST DEJECTION

In the psalm we read: "Who healeth the broken in heart..." Why are we told that? For it is a good thing to have a broken heart, and pleasing to God, as it is written: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit..." But further on in the psalm, we read: "And bindeth up their wounds." God does not entirely heal those who have broken hearts. He only eases their suffering, lest it torment and deject them. For dejection is not good and not pleasing to God. A broken heart prepares man for the service of God, but dejection corrodes service. We must distinguish between the two as carefully as between joy and wantonness; they are so easily confused, and yet are as far removed from one another as the ends of the earth.

## AGAINST WORRYING

We must not worry. Only one worry is permissible: a man should worry because he is worrying.

## THE CHOICE

If we could hang all our sorrows on pegs and were allowed to choose those we liked best, everyone of us would take back his own, for all the rest would seem even more difficult to bear.

## TRUE SORROW AND TRUE JOY

There are two kinds of sorrow and two kinds of joy. When a man broods over the misfortunes that have come upon him, when he cowers in a corner and despairs of help—that is a bad kind of sorrow, concerning which it is said: “The Divine Presence does not dwell in a place of dejection.” The other kind is the honest grief of a man who knows what he lacks.

The same is true of joy. He who is devoid of inner substance and, in the midst of his empty pleasures, does not feel and does not try to fill his lack, is a fool. But he who is truly joyful is like a man whose house has burned down, who feels his need deep in his soul and begins to build anew. His heart rejoices over every stone that is laid.

## ALL JOYS

All joys hail from the Garden of Eden, and jests too, provided they are uttered in true joy.

## SORROW AND HAPPINESS

Happiness settles the spirit, but sorrow drives it into exile.

## WHY THE REJOICING?

In the psalm we read: “Rejoice the soul of thy servant; for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.” Why the rejoicing? “For unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul!” It is rejoicing which makes it possible for me to lift up my soul to you.

## JOYLESS VIRTUE

If a man has fulfilled all the commandments, he is admitted to the Garden of Eden, even though he has not burned with fervor and has not experienced delight. But since he has felt

no delight on earth, he feels none there either. Finally, he even grumbles: "And they make all that to-do about paradise!" And hardly have the words left his lips, when he is thrown out!

### BETWEEN MEN

There are those who suffer very greatly and cannot tell what is in their hearts, and they go their ways full of suffering. But if they meet someone whose face is bright with laughter, he can quicken them with his gladness. And it is no small thing to quicken a human being!

### INTO GLADNESS

When people are merry and dance, it sometimes happens that they catch hold of someone who is sitting outside and grieving, pull him into the round, and make him rejoice with them. The same happens in the heart of one who rejoices: grief and sorrow draw away from him, but it is a special virtue to pursue them with courage and to draw grief into gladness, so that all the strength of sorrow may be transformed into joy.