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The Kabbalistic "Mystery of Faith" *How One Can Trust G-d in Good Times and Bad*

By Ariel Bar Tzadok
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It is easy to trust G-d and to thank Him when our lives are full of ease and we have every good thing. Yet, as we all know, times of good and plenty grow fewer and shorter. Our world is full of violence and irrational hatred. Rumors of wars, and terrorism fill our everyday thoughts. The economy is not what it used to be. Many of us have health problems. Many of us have problems with family members or other loved ones that in one form or another have fallen into patterns of self-destructive behavior. Granted, not everyone, but all too many of us sit and watch helplessly as precious aspects of the world around us crumble before our eyes.

We cry out in silent pain, knowing all too well, no one else is listening. They too have their problems. They are too busy dealing with their own to help us deal with ours. Therefore, we stand alone; surrounded by a hostile world that bears little sympathy for what we love in life.

For many, the harsh realities of life are enough to make one act hostile. In the jungle of life, the law is the survival of the fittest, is it not? For those of you who have read until here with agreement, my heart mourns for your sense of loss.

We do not live in a world where G-d intervenes at every moment to save us from our self-created problems. G-d no longer sends down plagues on unjust governments, nor does He anymore drown terrorist armies in the depths of the sea. This is all ancient history.

Today, G-d's methods of Divine intervention are different from how they were in the past. Today, G-d is much more subtle about His Divine movements. If we are not paying attention, we might mistake the Divine Hand for a mere act of nature, or as a coincidence, or as mere dumb luck. Yet, there is nothing dumb about luck and there is no such thing as a coincidence.

Indeed, we often say that "G-d works in mysterious ways," and the more we understand about G-d the more mysterious His ways appear. Yet, underlying G-d's "mysterious" ways is the reality of G-d's presence and more so, His Divine guidance.

G-d's Divine guidance, now here is a proverbial two-edged sword if there ever was one. On one hand, we pray that G-d should watch over us, bless us, and provide for us our desires. On the other hand, we certainly object to having a dominating, demanding G-d lording over us, telling us how to live our lives, what things we can and cannot do, and what is right and what is wrong.

We want to make our own decisions in our own lives and we expect G-d to accept that from our hands. After all, we are intelligent, mostly rational human beings. We are adults. We can make up our own minds and make our own choices, and G-d should have nothing to say about it. Rather, G-d should sit back, mind His own Divine business, and just continue to provide for us our blessings of abundance, prosperity, health, and well being.

What we are telling G-d is rather direct, give us what we want, and then go away. My dear friends, this is most unrealistic thinking, even for the least of religious types.

G-d is not a human being and therefore does not interact with us based upon the foibles of human emotion and feelings. Nonetheless, G-d is an active Presence and Intelligence. G-d is a real and living entity, although of a nature that our limited human minds cannot grasp.

Torah mysticism, Kabbalah, and meditation do provide us with insights into G-d's actual nature, yet all these courses of study and practice are predicated upon one basic element. One must first and foremost have FAITH in G-d. One must have faith that when one reaches out one's hand to G-d that G-d indeed will in turn grasp that hand and guide that one through the turmoils of life. This then is the heart of the matter.

Faith is understood by some to merely be an intellectual agreement with a set of religious or philosophical principles. Yet, this is not faith, this is belief. Faith is not something you believe. Faith is something that you do. Faith is not in your head, it encompasses your entire life.

Living life under the "luck of the draw" is not a life of faith. A life of faith actually enables one to rise above the strict limitations of fate. Indeed, faith is the salvation from fate, for those who so choose to embrace the change.

Yet, in order for one to live a life of faith, which elevates one above the natural forces in this jungle world of ours, one must have the one essential ingredient. One must have a living and walking relationship with G-d.

In a real living relationship with G-d, one does not merely ask, what can G-d do for me; one also asks what can I do for G-d.

The answer to this is not so hard to know. G-d already told us what He wants from us. He wants us to have happy, healthy, rich and abundant wealthy lives. He even told us everything we need to know about how to go about achieving this. He gave us His Torah, His "owners manual" for the human race. If we take care of ourselves, then abundance and blessings will be the natural reward.

Yet, what do we say? We say, "thank you G-d, we'll take our rewards, our blessings and abundance. As for what you want, well, we can compromise on that. After all, it is not like You are human. You are not like us. You only gave us these commandments and mitzvot for our sakes, not yours. Therefore, as we grow and change, we can let your Word grow and change along with us."

There is an inherent problem with this thinking. As the prophet Isaiah (55:8) said, "G-d's ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts." The Ultimate Intelligence of the universe does not merely dictate to us morality for some finite mortal human reasons. The edicts and Divine commands of the Torah have significance far beyond the limitations of our puny mortal lives that we live in the frail bodies of flesh that we presently inhabit.

When we consider ourselves smarter than G-d, raise our morality over His, and declare that our ways are better than His, G-d merely allows nature to take its course and we reap the results of our own shortsightedness. Our world and our lives are in such a mess today simply because of this. We have told G-d "gimme, gimme, gimme" and we offer nothing in return. We fulfill the old saying of our Sages, "in accordance to the effort invested are the results."

Faith is what can save us from ourselves. So important is faith that it and it alone is designated as the characteristic of correctness (the true meaning of righteousness). Habakkuk the prophet said, "the righteous will live by his faith." So important is faith that the Talmud (Makot 24a) states that the entire Torah, the living breathing Word of G-d can be summed up into these few short words spoken by Habakkuk.

Living by faith is easy to say. The concept is not too hard to grasp. However, to actually live a life of faith, this is very hard, although still within the grasp of all who will make the efforts.

Living a life of faith means that one must surrender one's concepts one what is right and wrong, good or bad, and accept upon oneself G-d's Higher Morality. In Proverbs 16:3, it is written, "commit your actions to G-d, and your thoughts will be established."

When something in your life does not go the way you want it to, whether it is in matters great or small, rather than curse your lot in life, consider that G-d has sent this episode into your life to teach you an important lesson.

When hard times come, do not sit back and pity yourself being a victim of fate. Rather, think about what is happening, and learn from the hard and bad times. Let them strengthen you. After the hard times have passed, and they do pass, time never stands still, you will be able to look back upon them with hindsight and see that there actually was good concealed within the apparent bad of the moment. Only one with eyes of faith can see this.

When you focus your thoughts upon G-d, you will begin to see life as G-d has meant life to be lived. You will recognize G-d's Moving Hand and realize that at all times, good and bad, G-d is actually there with you, providing for you, assisting you, and when necessary, carrying you. This reality transforms one's consciousness and enables one to grasp a glimpse into the invisible world that surrounds us.

Life is not haphazard. We do not just go from one detached moment to another. There is a mystery to life, and there is a mystery to faith. When one seeks out the mystery of faith, one learns the mystery of living.

There is a whole lot more to life than mere happiness and sadness, pleasure and pain. There is a whole lot more to life than living in our concrete jungles subject to the whims of fate. Look out upon the world and all you will see is what the world has to offer you, with all its limitations, stress, frustrations and pain.

Look up to G-d, transcend this world, and you will see what it is that you have always been looking for. The Holy Zohar states, "faith gives life," and "faith rectifies and heals all one's parts."

Many are the secrets of faith. This essay is only an introduction into the topic.