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Anyone who has read the Bilvavi books knows that “generally speaking, there are no short cuts.” It is consistently emphasized that we must take one step at a time, even if that means working on one area for years. We are exhorted to be patient and persistent — qualities that do not come naturally to most of us. In addition, we are told of all the levels of growth expected of us, most of which we have long ago allowed ourselves to ignore. The reader is urged to realize that acquiring spiritual knowledge and tools are a process. For the most part, therefore, a new concept will not be fully explained immediately, but rather in a step-by-step manner.

The truth is that deep down, we all know that we have the potential to rise far above the plateau where each of us has stopped, and we feel unfulfilled. For the most part, we aren't lazy; we have just become very confused. Most of us have read or heard much information about self-improvement, all of which may be true, but we don't know where to start. Every book or lecture gives a dose of inspiration, but the next one causes us to look elsewhere. After a while, our enthusiasm wanes, and we come to expect today's message to be erased by tomorrow's. What is more, we realize that we're not even quite sure what spiritual growth really is. How often have we convinced ourselves that we understood a truth and have changed as a result, only to collapse as soon as we are put to the test? And so, we slowly slip into skepticism, albeit reserving inside a spark of hope that one day, we might find help.

It is this help that is offered in the Bilvavi books. Indeed, there is no quick fix; all we are given is a ladder to climb, one rung at a time. But we need not ask for more. Since the first rung is clearly defined, as well as each one after that, we are free to confidently focus our energies on a single particular area and set aside every other level for the time being. We know that change will take time, but we can finally be free of the self-doubt and confusion that has been plaguing us for so long.

In many cases, the reader might not have even been aware that what seemed like one level is really two or more. Love of G-d, for example, comprises conditional love followed by unconditional love; fear of G-d comprises five phases. This is another example of the clarity that pervades this work.

In this book, we also gain from a clearer kind of self-knowledge. We may think that our motives are simple, but in truth, as the author teaches us, we are much more complex. He shows us how to find many distinct elements of motive, and clearly identify each one. That new degree of understanding will be the springboard for truly elevating our intentions.

Yet perhaps the most important contribution of this work is indicated in the one word that has come to refer to the series and its author — Bilvavi (“in my heart”). In this work, we learn about the

difference between knowledge of the mind and knowledge of the heart. Our ingrained outlook that is responsible for our deepest feelings and instinctive reactions are found in our heart. It turns out that we have in our personality's two very different components: one that grows almost as quickly as we can read and comprehend, and the other that moves much more slowly and needs

to be reached and nurtured in its own a particular way. While these books certainly expand our minds, more importantly, they give us specific methods for working with the heart — the primary gauge of our inner growth. We sense that the author has a special ability to penetrate our hearts.

This second volume, based on a lecture series of 28 classes, returns to the themes of Part One, but offers even greater clarity by devoting a full chapter to each distinct aspect of spiritual growth, as well as providing sources from classic literature for further research. The nature of the “heart” is treated at length, as well as how it can truly be reached and changed. We trust that the reader who studies this work seriously will once again feel enthusiasm about spiritual growth, gain new insights into self-improvement, and find the motivation to really change and to feel closeness to the Creator.

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