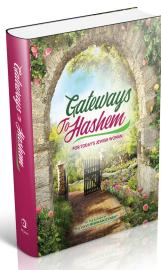
# BILUA VI

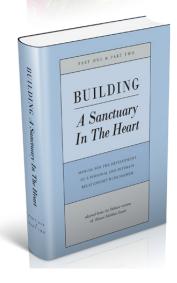


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## בלבבי משכן אבנה







#### CHUKAS PURITY ON THE OUTSIDE & INSIDE

Tum'ah (Spiritual Defilement) – When Holiness Becomes Hidden

Parshas Chukas begins with the laws of parah adamah (the red heifer), which is part of the Torah's ritual purification process to those who become contaminated from a corpse (tumas meis).

Ritual defilement, tum'ah, is from the word "tamun", "hidden", because it hides and conceals the true holiness in something. When a person becomes tamei (defiled), his inner holiness goes into "hiding", and he is in an impure state (until he purifies himself, depending on what the purification process (taharah) entailed).

Tum'ah (ritual impurity) is also from the word "tim-tum", "blockage", because it blocks, conceals, and covers over the holiness, placing it into a state of concealment (he'elam).

#### **External Defilement**

There are many levels to *tum'ah*, a state of spiritual defilement that descends upon the physical body. The Rambam says that the concept of immersing in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) after becoming *tamei* is "to immerse in the waters of *daas* (understanding)". The root of *tum'ah* began with the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), specifically from the evil contained in the mixture

of the *Eitz HaDaas*. By contrast, the root of *taharah* (ritual purity) began with the good contained in the *Eitz HaDaas*. After one becomes *tamei* and then returns to a state of *taharah*, he is essentially returning from the evil, impaired aspect of the *Eitz HaDaas* to the good, rectified aspect that was contained in the *Eitz HaDaas*.

#### External and Internal Impurity

There is external impurity, and in turn, there is external purity that can remove it. External impurity comes upon the physical body and the physical action which removes this impurity is to immerse in the *mikveh*. But there is also impurity that descends upon the soul. An example of this is "blockage of the heart" (*timtum halev*), which comes mainly through consuming forbidden foods. Such impurity affects the person on the inside, causing his inside to become impure.

Chazal state that the evil inclination is called by seven names, and one of its names is "tamei" ("impure").<sup>2</sup> This refers to an impurity that affects a person on the inside. The evil inclination resides in man, in the "left chamber of the heart"<sup>3</sup>. This is not an external state of impurity on the outside of the person, but an impurity that

2 Sukkah 52a

3 as explained in sefer Tanya

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resides within and which affects him on the inside.

Inner impurity affects a person not only in the physical sense (for which he must immerse in a *mikveh*, in order to remove it), but also in his heart and mind. When impurity contaminates the heart, it is called *timtum halev* (blockage of the heart), which we mentioned earlier; and when impurity affects the mind, it manifests as thoughts that are closed, blocked, and unclear ("*stumin v'chatumin*" – "closed and sealed"), and the person can't think clearly.

Thus, inner impurity affects both the mind and the heart.

#### Impurity in the Heart – An Indifference to the Spiritual

When the heart has become impure - for example, if a person ate non-kosher food, which causes "blockage of the heart" - the heart's feelings will become blocked, and he will become insensitive to the spiritual. His feelings will become "hidden" deep within him, and he will lack emotion or have indifference towards that which he should feel emotion towards.

"A dead person cannot feel"<sup>4</sup> – the impurity of a corpse can be in the heart as well, which causes the heart to not be able to feel holiness. "The wicked in their lifetime are called dead"<sup>5</sup> – a person can be dead even while alive: when his heart has become blocked from feeling holiness, and he is insensitive to the spiritual. In order to undo the blockage of the heart, a person will need to purify the heart.

Purifying the Heart: Through Prayer, and Through Finding Your Holiness

Generally speaking, in order to purify the heart, there is a prayer: וטהר אבדך באמת, "And purify our hearts to serve You in truth".6

This is a prayer, and in general, "prayer accomplishes half the task." What is the other half we will need to do, in our personal *avodah*, in order to merit purity of heart? The *avodah* is as follows.

Whenever any person sins, even if he has committed all of the worst sins in the world, such as Eliezer ben Dordaya did<sup>8</sup> – he will feel like he is indifferent to holiness. Still, he will not become completely indifferent. The impurity can't ruin the heart totally. His feelings will be blocked, but he will still be able to feel some small crack in his feelings, which can be open to the spiritual. That little crack is always there, and one can always feel it, no matter how blocked his feelings have become from sin.

"A Jew, even when he sins, is still a Jew." Even the worst sinners of the Jewish people, when faced with the test of giving up their lives for Hashem, were willing to sacrifice their lives for Him. So there is never such a thing as total *timtum halev*, even when the *timtum halev* is very dominant. There is always a small crack of holiness that can shine through. This is true even if he committed every sin in the world!

Thus, by way of *avodah*, every person will have times where his feelings

6 Recited in the Shemoneh Esrei of Yomim

towards holiness are closed, as well as times when his feelings towards holiness are opened. This is not felt on the same level by each person, as it is a matter that depends on the particular spiritual level of each person. But in any case, the *avodah* of a person is to feel some small feeling of holiness that he does have.

One can try this with a particular aspect of holiness that one strongly identifies with and then concentrate ones' thoughts in that area. From reflecting deeply into it, along with prayer to Hashem to be guided to the truth, a person can succeed in feeling the small opening to holiness that is always with him.

When a person becomes aware of the strongest feeling for holiness he identifies with, which is already opened to him and which is always with him, he has the key towards feelings for holiness.

It is written, "Open for Me an opening, the size of a needle, and I will open for you an opening the size of an entranceway."11 The simple understanding of this concept is that there is previously no opening at all and one has to make the opening, and then Hashem will come and assist the person. But the deeper, truer understanding of this is that there is already a small opening that is there, and a person's avodah is to just to open it a little bit more - "the size of a needle", just as a needle makes a rip in a cloth. After that there is that small opening, and one can then work harder on oneself and further connect oneself to the opening towards holiness.

Every Jew already has this small opening – not only the opening the

11 Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2

Б Кесітеа in the Snemonen Esrei of Yomim Noraim

<sup>7</sup> Vayikra Rabbah parshas Tzav 10:5

<sup>8</sup> Avodah Zarah 17a

<sup>9</sup> Sanhedrin 44a

<sup>10</sup> Editor's Note: This concept is mentioned in the works of Rebbi Nachman of Breslev, as well as in sefer Nesivos Shalom (Slonim) and many other holy sefarim.

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size of a needle, but an opening that comes before that, a tiny, hidden opening that can be subtly felt. It is always some small feeling towards something that is holy, and through it, a person can further connect to the holiness and make the opening bigger. Every *neshamah* that is a member of *Yisrael* has one point – *at least* one point – that contains a small opening towards holiness.

If a person is trying to work on himself to improve, with the attitude that he doesn't have this small opening, and that he needs to "create" this space in himself, then his *avodah* will be most difficult. It is very hard to improve when you can't sense any sensitivity to holiness already present in yourself. You need that small opening in yourself in order to work on yourself, so you must discover it within yourself.

#### The Proper Attitude Towards Self-Improvement and Spiritual Growth

So far, we have described one side of the coin: finding the 'small opening' oneself. Now we will discuss the other side of the coin: how to improve.

Usually, whenever a person learns the words of *Chazal* which describe the qualities of good character or higher spiritual levels, a person views these matters as being 'outside' of him, and not as something that is already present within him. One tends to view self-improvement and acquiring higher levels as matters that are outside of him and which need to be "drawn" onto him from the outside, so that the spiritual gains can become a part of him.

However, this is an unsuccessful approach. With such a perspective, a person usually will not acquire the mat-

ters he is learning about, for he cannot relate to any of these levels as a part of himself, only as something outside of himself that he needs to somehow draw onto himself.

There is a different approach one can take, when learning the words of *Chazal* about any of the qualities and levels we wish to acquire. A person can focus on finding how the quality in question already exists in him on some level. When you focus on whatever level you already *do* have – even if it is only a small percentage of what it should be – you are then focused on whatever personal portion you have already acquired in your *ruchniyus* (spirituality), and from there onward, you can succeed further.

For example, when a person begins to learn *Mesillas Yesharim*, he sees that the first level is *zehirus* (watchfulness). He might become discouraged, thinking that he can't even acquire this first, basic level of self-improvement, and if he tries to work very hard on himself at acquiring this level, it will be too difficult for him. Instead, he needs to see how he already has some level of *zehirus*, and to discover the areas in his life where his *zehirus* is more revealed. He needs to find the small "opening" that is already there, and then expand upon the opening.

### Removing Blockage of the Mind (When Learning Gemara)

So far, we have explained how to attain purification of the **heart**, after it has become defiled. But we mentioned earlier that there is also defilement, which can come upon the **mind**. Let us explain, therefore, how the **mind** can be purified.

The Rambam says that immersing in a *mikveh* is called immersing in the "waters of *daas*" (understanding). A person's *daas* may be pure, or it may be defiled. When a person's *daas* is defiled, a person's thinking abilities become closed up and blocked, or he won't be able to think correctly. In turn, purifying the *daas* is when there is *seichel hayashar* (straight intellect) and a person can think clearly, purely, and logically.

Understandably, there are many different approaches to Torah learning, and not every way is the same. However, as a general course of action, this is the approach to take.

You can have a person who learns Torah, who enjoys looking for good questions; and then he searches for answers to his questions. Understandably, this shows that he has an interest in learning Torah and a desire to know, and it sharpens his mind. However, this alone does not build a person's Torah learning. In order for a person to build his Torah learning, he needs to find the "small opening" which already exists within , just as in the case of acquiring higher spiritual levels and feelings.

When a person difficulty learning the *Gemara*, he shouldn't just think about the question. He should go back and review each step of the *Gemara* until now, and come to a point where he knows what he understands, and he knows what he doesn't understand. He must know: "What did I understand so far? And what do I still not understand?"

Then, after doing so, he should connect himself to the points of understanding in the *Gemara* that are already clear to him. He must find the "opening" – a point in which he *does* 

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understand a certain part of the *sugya*. Then he can go from there, further developing his understanding.

Sometimes, when a person tries to build upon what he already understands, his mind becomes blocked and he loses whatever he understood until now. But if you connect yourself to the point that you did understand, it opens the way for further understanding.

The parts that are beyond me, which I don't yet understand, are called the timtum (blockage) in the daas of the mind. In the case of difficulties while learning the sugya of the Gemara, the parts of the sugya which I don't understand are the areas where the da'as is "defiled" and hence the thinking will be clouded when it comes to those points. It was mentioned before that a person must become aware of what he understands and what he doesn't understand. But many times, when you focus on the points of the sugya that you do understand, this "opening" leads you to further your understanding of the sugya, and then even the difficult points become understandable to you.

This is a great, deep attitude towards all of life. In whatever matter a person is trying to acquire, a person needs to find how there is some small level of it already existing in him. If a person wants to improve in his *ruchniyus* (spiritual level), Torah learning, *davening*, or in doing more acts of *chessed*, etc. he needs to first see how there is already a point of *chessed* existing within him, rather than viewing these things as matters that are completely "outside" of him. This is the meaning of "Torah scholars are called builders."<sup>12</sup>

These things are not merely "maalos"

(qualities) to learn about, or "very big, important matters", or levels that bring you reward in the World To Come. All of that is true, but that should not be the focus. The focus should be that all of these things already exist in you to some level.

That is true not only in regards to developing feelings for holiness, but it is also true with regards to learning Torah, where we must also begin with a small, simple opening, and then build upon it, step-by-step. You will still need to exert yourself in your learning, of course, but the gain will be that it will be built upon what is already existing in you.

So, in summary, the rule is that in whatever spiritual quality, level, matter, or point you are trying to acquire, you first need to see how it already exists in you to some level - you need to find the small "opening".

#### External Purity (Mikveh) – A Means to Awaken the Inner Purity of the Neshamah

Living in this way enables one to leave *tum'ah* (defilement) and enter into *taharah* (purity), where one's *avodah* will be from within oneself, and it will be well-developed and structured.

This way of serving Hashem, the "inner light", is the meaning of "My G-d, the soul You gave me is pure" <sup>13</sup>, which can penetrate past all the defilement that comes from the outside. We can receive external purification from immersing in the *mikveh* as well, but that is a light that comes from the outside, which we should then use to awaken the inner purity, of "My G-d, the soul You gave to me is pure." How

exactly do we awaken the inner purity?

Understandably, if a person has become defiled, he needs to immerse in the *mikveh*, but he should not remain with this external level of purity. Rather, one needs to awaken the inner purity of the *neshamah*. This purity exists in every Jew, and all a person needs to do is to open it further, and then, slowly but surely, it will become revealed. On a more specific level, it has been explained here that each person can feel some small feeling for holiness in at least one area in his life, as well as some point of understanding in his Torah learning.

The depth of it is to awaken the pure *neshamah*, and then the inner purity will slowly extend to his outside as well.

When we combine the purity we can attain from the external [immersing in the *mikveh*], along with the depth of the purity which stems from the inside and which penetrates to the outside, this is like the holy *Aron* which was pure both on the outside and on the inside. Such a soul will cling to purity, both in the external sense and in the inner sense.

#### In Conclusion

This is the meaning of "Torah scholars are called builders."<sup>14</sup> The Torah scholars build the world, and the perfection of man, step after step, activating the potential of the soul, from within. Through this, a person merits לב טהור ברא לי אלוקים, "A pure heart G-d created me with."<sup>15</sup>

(from BILVAVI ON THE PARSHAH)

14 Berachos 64a 15 Tehillim 41:9

12 Berachos 64a

#### CONNECTING TO YOUR STRONG POINT . SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION CHAPTER 12

#### The True Solution To Low Self-Worth

Many people suffer from feelings of low self-worth. There are generally two different sources of how a person measures his worth: His opinion of himself, and the opinion of others about him. Usually when a person is suffering from low self-worth, it is both – he has a low opinion of himself, and he also thinks of himself based on the opinion of others towards him. If a person thinks poorly of himself, he will usually give that negative feeling of himself towards others, whether consciously or unconsciously, and he is waiting for approval and worthiness to come to him from others (whether consciously or unconsciously). But unfortunately, this is a recipe for failure, because the inevitable reality is that most people have difficulty expressing to another person how much they value him and how well they think of him.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, the person with low self-worth continues to beam his negative opinion of himself towards others, and others pick up on it. He is waiting for them to make him feel worthy, but this only exasperates everyone else who are picking up on his feelings of low self-worth. He is left empty-handed from what he wants, and the issue 'snowballs' – he doesn't get social approval, and that only intensifies his own feelings of low self-worth which he already has about himself. In his perception (which is incorrect), if others don't hold him in esteem, he takes this as proof that there is nothing valuable and respectful about him.<sup>2</sup>

There are all kinds of external factors that contribute to one's feelings of low self-worth, but the root reason for it (whether he feels worthless on his own or because those in his environment think poorly of him) is because the person isn't aware of his hidden potential. He has abil-

1 False, flattering compliments which are superficial and not genuine, and which are mostly uttered for some self-serving purpose, are not effective. When a person receives such compliments that aren't genuine, he doesn't feel satisfied from it and he remains with his lack of self-worth. And if he is a more honest, no-nonsense type of person, or if his emotions are very refined and sensitive, he can easily feel how such compliments are empty and meaningless. The false compliments are also hurtful to him, and he feels as if he is being stabbed when he hears them.

2 When people aren't feeling valued enough or held in esteem enough by others, this is not proof at all that there is nothing valuable or worthy about the person. This is because most of the time, the other person doesn't even recognize his own inner world, and certainly he doesn't recognize the inner world of another and be able to give over a genuine feeling of value to another. Unfortunately, we find ourselves in a world where people are like strangers who act coldly to each other, as if they don't recognize each other - it is almost impossible to find someone who genuinely recognizes the qualities of his friend and who can make his friend feel valued and worthy.

ities that he doesn't know about, and he needs to become aware of them, connect to them, and make use of them. Hashem, in His great compassion, gave wonderful gifts to a person. He gave a person hidden potential in his soul, which are priceless treasures. If a person doesn't recognize his soul and the treasures that are within it – his capabilities, which are the gifts that Hashem has bestowed him with – he doesn't value himself, and this will also make it harder for others to value him.

But when a person recognizes his qualities and he connects to them, and especially if he recognizes and makes use of his best quality, his low self-worth will disappear, his self-worth will expand, and he will no longer be hoping to get 'crumbs' from the 'tables' of others in order to feel that he's worthy and valuable, thereby saving himself from a life of disappointment.<sup>3</sup>

#### True Self-Worth – Valuing The Internal Gifts That Hashem Gave To Me

Once we are on this topic, we shall now digress a bit from the general topic of this chapter and discuss more about what true self-worth is. Today, there are several options by which a person can learn get self-worth.

In one method, a person is "sold" a false version of himself in which he is told that he has capabilities which he really doesn't have, but the therapist convinces him that he really has those qualities and that he can become a successful person, he can become a person in the big world, he can become strong and self-sufficient, or that he's capable of anything, etc.

In this method, it's possible that it can take away the person's suffering of low self-worth, but it will certainly not

3 It should be noted that there are many people though who do have a high self-worth for themselves, even though they do not recognize their abilities yet. This can be possible for any of the following reasons. (1) A person may have certain talents and he is aware of it (and a talent comes from any of the soul's various abilities). (2) Some people are born with a natural balance in their soul (relatively speaking) and therefore they don't fall in to negative feelings of low self-worth. (3) In others, it is because they are naturally haughty and therefore they were born with a blown up sense of self-worth about themselves. (4) They may be the type who feel fine with whatever they do, and therefore they value themselves even if their achievements are very minimal. They feel good about even the smallest thing they do. (There may be other reasons too why a person can have a positive self-worth even though he doesn't recognize his soul yet). But, the common denominator between all of these reasons is that they are all superficial sources of selfworth (some more and some less). In any of these cases, though, if a person recognizes his capabilities and connects to them, especially if he connects with his strongest power, he will have a much more fundamental and stronger self-worth.

#### CONNECTING TO YOUR STRONG POINT . SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION CHAPTER 12

provide the person with a genuine self-worth. If a person doesn't recognize what his true self is, how can he value that self?! Whatever he is being taught to value is not about himself, it is about valuing what he imagines himself to be or what he would like to be. With this approach, not only won't the person value himself properly, but he will be fooling himself and he won't be living his genuine self. He will become disconnected from reality and he lives in an imaginary perception of himself, as if he can become anything he imagines himself to be. It won't give a person a positive feeling about himself, and it won't be genuine self-worth. Nor will it be helpful to him.

There is also another method that is used by therapy to give a person self-worth. The person is shown what his natural qualities are, which Hashem has given to him, and how to make use of them. However, the person is also told that there are his own independent qualities, and his ego gets blown up on purpose so that he can get self-worth at any cost. The therapist teaches him to bring out his trait of conceitedness, or the negative version of himself, to make him feel as if he's in control of everything: "The river is mine, and it is I who made it."

There is a gain here in that the person is taught how to recognize his qualities, but the problem with this approach, a very big problem, is that the person becomes transformed into a conceited person (baal gaavah). Hashem says about a baal gaavah, "I am him cannot dwell under the same roof."

And, such a person will also lose his friends and he will be disliked by everyone, because nobody wants to be around a *baal gaavah*. People have no tolerance for a *baal gaavah*, because he is so consumed with his own image that he will destroy anyone in his path in order to feel better about himself.

In order for a person to properly gain from such an approach in which he hones in on his qualities, he would have to work hard on uprooting his conceitedness at the same time, making sure that he isn't becoming a haughty person.

Another method used to provide self-worth is that the person is advised to set goals and projects and undertakings, which are way above his current level, and he is told to work hard at it and apply himself fully to it. He gets self-worth from his appreciation to reach higher. Al-

though this is wonderful, it is not recommended for most people, and it's certainly not feasible when a person is just beginning to work with his soul. It is only for individuals who are capable of high levels of being able to sacrifice.

Finally, there is a method for self-worth by which a person can learn to focus on his qualities, especially his strongest quality. In addition, he becomes aware that these capabilities are wonderful gifts from Hashem.<sup>4</sup> They are his capabilities, but they aren't coming from his own strength and from his own wisdom. Rather, they are gifts which Hashem has given to him. In this approach, self-worth essentially means, "I value the gifts that I have received from Hashem."

This approach for self-worth is the correct and proper path to take, for most people. It gives a person a high level of self-worth, which is genuine and pure, and it fills the soul with vitality and joy. And it causes many problems related to low self-worth to simply dissipate and go away on their own.

#### Investing In Our Strongest Ability

In order to feel more alive and energized from our strongest ability, we need to become connected to it. We need to invest a lot of effort into this, to nurture, strengthen, and uplift it, and actualize it from its potential state.

The ability which will help us connect to our strongest power and help us prepare to invest ourselves in it is: the power of identification. If a person doesn't identify with something, he cannot feel connected to it, because he will have no will, no push, to invest his time and energy into it. Compare this to an analogy of a person who needs to run a functioning home. He needs to organize

4 The truth is that even our faults and shortcomings – our negative aspects of character – are also wonderful gifts from Hashem. Our "negative" aspects are in fact not truly "negative" in their essence – they are actually positive abilities which we haven't yet balanced. And in fact, there is an additional "gift" contained in our negative aspects , faults, and shortcomings – the fact that we were given the privilege to repair them. This is how we use every aspect of our soul, combining all of our soul in its entirety (qualities and weaknesses together) to reach wholeness. However, it takes a long time and inner work to get to this perspective of viewing our weaknesses in a positive light. Therefore, at the beginning of working with our souls (which is what this sefer is coming to discuss), when we are taking the path of "Do good" in which we focus on our qualities, we are not discussing how to deal with our weaknesses, and instead we are discussing our positive points and how to connect to them. Only after we have recognized our qualities and we have strengthened them, can we be empowered to view our negative aspects not as negative but as positive aspects that merely require tikkun (repairing).

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it, clean it, upkeep it, go shopping, cook, pay the utility bills, taxes, etc.

If the house is not his, he doesn't identify with it and he will have no motivation to put effort in taking care of this house. But if it's his house, he identifies with it, he feels connected to it, and therefore he will be motivated to take care of this house, and he can do it all happily.

The lesson from this is that when we recognize our strongest power and we identify with it — when we become aware that our strongest ability is who "I" am, and in turn that "I" am my strongest ability — that makes us connected to our strongest ability and then we will want to invest ourselves in actualizing it. After all, a person loves himself and he worries about himself, and he wants to be successful, so he is prepared to do whatever is needed in order to benefit himself.

Once he realizes that his true "I" means his strongest ability, he will want to connect to his strongest ability and invest himself in it, doing whatever is needed in order to actualize it, and he is more than happy to do it.<sup>5</sup> To the degree that one identifies with his strongest ability, he will connect to it more, and he will keep investing himself into actualizing it.<sup>6</sup>

5 From a deeper perspective, the true self of a person is the innermost point of the soul, the soul's very essence, which is called "portion of G-d from above". The strongest ability of a person which is the closest point to the soul's very inner essence, because it is the very first "extension" of the soul's innermost essence, making the strongest ability of the soul directly attached and connected to the soul's very essence (the innermost self), directly clothing it and serving it. However, at the beginning stage of self-recognition, it is very hard for a person to identify with the very innermost essence of the soul, and therefore our focus at the beginning has to be on identifying with our strongest ability, which is the point just below our very essence itself, and which is much closer for us to identify with.

6 In the next chapter, we will be explaining how to utilize the potential of our strongest ability. But already at the stage of identifying our strongest point, we are beginning to actualize it somewhat. This is because when we

[מהספר הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש]



נפש האדם עשויה רבדים רבדים - שכבות שכבות, והכניסה לרובדי הנפש על ידי מהלך של הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש היא המפתח לחיים הטובים, ובמילים חדות יותר - היא המפתח לעצם החיים.

בכדי לחיות, עלינו לעבוד את הבורא יתברך ולקיים את מצוותיו, לבנות לעצמנו צורת חיים נכונה, מתוקנת ומלאת חיות ושמחה, להוציא את כוחותינו מהכח לפועל ולפתור את בעיותינו. כמו כן, עלינו להביט אל פנימיותנו, ולהיות באחדות - עם עצמנו, עם זולתנו, ועם בוראנו.

והדרך לכך הינה; הכרה עצמית ועבודה מעשית של העצמת הנפש בצורה מובנית, יסודית, היקפית ועקבית.

וזה עיקר מגמתו של ספר זה - הדרכה מעשית להכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש. כשמו - כן הוא.

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