

The Judaism I Was Never Taught

And Other Thoughts

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## **Preface**

This is not meant to be a scholarly work. This is an attempt to organize my thoughts and answer some questions posed to me by my students. Much of this is based on our Kabala classes and Bar/Bat Mitzvah studies with my students.

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## INTRODUCTION

I remember my mother saying that when she was a little girl, she would ask her father questions about our faith and was always told, “Because I said so.” or “Because that’s the way we do it.”

It wasn’t a very satisfying answer especially when it wasn’t what the greater community believed. It is particularly difficult to accept when your faith is based on asking questions and trying to understand what G-d wants from us.

A generation later the questions came from me and the answers were the same. Ten years at the Yeshiva and the answers were not forthcoming. It wasn’t until I went to college and took a comparative religions class that I started to get the answers I was really looking to understand. It is particularly interesting to note that the time period of these studies was the late 60’s during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. When we got to look at Judaism, the professor made a statement that stopped me cold. “According to the Jewish faith, you don’t have to be Jewish to go to Heaven. You just had to be a good person.”

I, of course, immediately challenged him. What religion didn’t think that they had the exclusive track for getting to heaven? We discussed the idea a little more until he said, “Why don’t you ask your rabbi?” So I did.

That Saturday when I went to synagogue I went up to the rabbi after services. “Rabbi, you wouldn’t believe what my professor said in class the other day. He said according to our religion you don’t have to be Jewish to go to Heaven.”

“Yeah, so ?” was his reply.

“Do you mean it’s true? In ten years at the Yeshiva I was never taught this. Don’t you think it was kind of important?”

He shrugged and walked away. I suppose the reason it was important to me, was unlike my friends, I didn’t have to go around feeling sorry for those who weren’t of my faith. I didn’t have to judge others or think that I was superior. I could accept people just as they were. As long as they were good people they would go to Heaven. It was the first time I got an answer that made sense, and I could take pride in that answer.

Several years later, when I was married and had a child, I came to a congregation that had a different outlook than I was use to when it came to children. There wasn’t a rabbi; the congregation was too small. The congregation had lost the person who conducted services to spinal cancer. They approached me to take over. I did my best to turn them down. I explained how I wasn’t qualified, how I had other responsibilities, how I had a two year old son to watch.... In short I tried every excuse I could think of but to no avail.

It was simple, If I didn't take over they would have to close down the synagogue.

“ Don't worry, we'll watch your son. Children are the future. What's the point if we don't have children?”

So I took over. While I stood on the bema conducting services, they played peek-a-boo with my son, bounced him on their knees, and kept him amused. I was not used to this at all! Children were suppose to be quiet and removed if they weren't. My son loved the attention, and I could relax and not worry while I learned how they wanted the service conducted. It became a nice way to spend Saturday mornings.

Things worked out well. But soon I was being asked religious questions. What do I know? So I began what became a 35 year (so far) journey to find answers. I probably never would have chosen this route. But now it had become my turn to answer 'those' questions. I wanted to give better answers than I had gotten. There had to be better answers. Little by little I got those answers. But it was only recently that I got a chance to more fully explore some of the mystical aspects of Judaism. Things really started to fall into place. I found my religion. I had answers.

## Kabala - The Tree of Life

Before I get started there are some concepts and definitions I need to provide so that the reader can get up to speed.

The Kabala is the basis of Jewish mysticism. It is suppose to provide the deep understanding and purpose of Creation in our place in the scheme of things. However it is taught through imagery and poetry and has double and even triple meanings. It is said that before even starting to study this discipline you have to be well versed in scriptures, happily married, and over 40. While that is probably true, there is a simpler way of understanding some basic concepts. The rest I'll leave to your further inquiries of someone more knowledgeable than me.

Another name for the Kabala is The Tree of Life. We are first introduced to the Tree of Life in Genesis chapter 2 verse 9. When G-d created the Garden of Eden He placed two special trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He told Adam he could eat the fruit of any tree in the Garden except for these two trees. We hear more about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil with the story of Eve and the serpent, but there is nothing further about the Tree of Life. Why? Adam and Eve had knowledge of it but could not partake in its fruit. One of my Bar-Mitzvah students, Michael Gootkin, felt that G-d had put the two trees there for future use after Adam and Eve had learned other things first. Then, when they broke the rule and ate the forbidden fruit, it was so overwhelming that they didn't know how to deal with the knowledge. They would have had even more trouble if they ate from the Tree of Life. They just weren't experienced enough to deal with all that information at once. G-d had to banish them from the Garden and remove any chance of them getting overwhelmed with knowledge they weren't prepared to deal with. They didn't have the life experience yet. It's interesting how much that sounds like the prerequisite for studying the Kabala, the Tree of Life.

So what is this Tree of Life? Through the books of the *Zohar* and the *Sefer Yetzira*, an explanation is given of the relationship between an all perfect, all knowing Creator and his finite creation. The Tree is a description of the attributes of G-d. It has been described as an upside-down tree with the roots in Heaven. It starts with *keter* or crown. This is where ideas are formulated. The ideas come from the *ein sof*, the Void, the infinite source of all things. The 'trunk' of the tree is *daat*, knowledge, the branches on the left are considered female attributes and are balanced on the right with the male. So on the left would be *bina*, understanding, and the right would be *chochma*, wisdom. Knowledge connects them. The next layer down would be *gvurah*, strength, and *chesed*, grace, tempered by justice. It is interesting that the next level of branches are *tiferet*, grace balanced with *netzah*, which means 'victory' in the form of an everlasting conclusion. These result in *rachamin*, mercy. These layers lead to *hod*, glory and *yesod*, the foundation of *malchut* where Man is, which is the Kingdom. This is where everything comes to fruition.

Artists and poets have tried to paint with pallet and words this 'tree' with limited success. The reason being that an artist has a hard enough time conveying three dimensions within two, when he tries to paint multi-dimensions something always seems to be missing. The same is true with the poet. As soon as he puts his thoughts into words, he limits the understanding of what he wishes to convey.

I use to try and describe it as a group of artists in a circle around a model. Each are asked to paint what they see. Each drawing is accurate from the perspective of each artist but none tell the whole story. A minister that I use to work with, Reverend DeQuattro, had a more accurate way of describing G-d's attributes. He suggested that each artist had a different color laser and when they all shone to the middle the attributes were complete.

So what we are left with are brief glimpses of understanding. Rather than getting bogged down with, or picking apart the imagery in words or pictures, look at the relationships between each of these attributes and how they affect one another, because the influences are there between layers as well as across the layers. Each aspect affects and builds on the others. So in fact we have an influence on G-d as He has on us. Think of that tree. Without roots the tree can't exist. Neither can the tree survive without branches and leaves. The trunk holds it all together and acts as a conduit and a structure. Together you have a vibrant living thing.

## **Describing G-d and the Beginning of Creation**

A number of years ago I had a Bar-Mitzvah student, Scott Bogner, who proclaimed that the only reason he was doing this ‘stuff’ was because his parents were making him. He was going to be a scientist and didn’t need religion. I told him I found it interesting that he felt that way. It seemed to me as a scientist it would make him more religious. In fact, it was an essential part of his faith to use a scientific method to understand and practice his religion. It stopped him in his tracks.

The Jewish religion expects you to question and look for answers. How can you expect to help G-d finish creation if you don’t know how it works? The more you learn about Creation, the more evidence you’ll have that it could not have been a series of random events. As you investigate, you’ll find things fit and work together too well to have happened by accident.

If you want an example, go to the internet and look at a website at [www.magnet.fsu.edu](http://www.magnet.fsu.edu) and look at the site listed as ‘Powers of Ten.’ You can’t help but marvel and be in awe of Creation. This site works in two directions. It telescopes out to show our place on Earth, the Solar System, the Milky Way and the far reaches of the Universe. You can also go in the opposite direction micro scoping down to the cellular level, then atomic level, to a quark. You also will realize that the universe down to smallest particle follows very strict rules and is too highly organized to be an accident or random events.

So if it’s not an accident, who/what created it and why? Let’s start with who/what is G-d? I AM THAT I AM. Take all matter, all space and add Life Force or call it Intelligent Consciousness, all that is and that would come close. Now add Einstein’s theory that matter nor energy can neither be created or destroyed and we start to describe G-d.

Socrates described G-d as the Beginning of the Beginning. The World is too orderly to have happened by accident. Whoever created it is the Creator. People have asked who created him? One can keep doing that, but at some point you have an origin. That is the Creator. According to Genesis, there was a Void. Then G-d said “Let there be Light!” and things got started. One Kabbalist described it as G-d, who is everywhere and everything, contracted part of himself to make room for what he was going to create. Then he couldn’t be everywhere was one concern, where did he get the materials was another. Then I remembered that Man was created in G-d’s image. Remembering my pregnant wife gave me the answer. Somehow a woman makes room for her creation in her body and uses the nutrients in her body to provide the materials. Elements are taken in, and following a “blueprint,” a being is created.

At a wedding one time, I heard a rabbi remind the bride and groom that in a marriage there are three participants, a man, a woman and G-d. When a child is created, each

contributes to that new life. The man contributes the Y chromosomes, the woman, the X, and G-d, the soul. All three are needed to create life.

What is that 'soul?' It is that 'conscience awareness,' that Life Force that takes us out of the realm of just atoms or cells, to something much more. Something with an awareness of surroundings, the ability to remember, plan, create as well as procreate. Perhaps it is best described the way the Hindus do, as a drop of water.

A drop of water has dimension, weight, and mass. When it is placed in the river, it can't be retrieved with the exact same atoms. It becomes part of the river. Our souls would follow that description. A part of G-d is introduced into the body that the man and woman had created. Then it becomes a sentient being. The soul's attributes may include unfinished vows from part of a previous soul. It may provide the drive or creativity from a past existence. Whatever makes up that soul, the contribution of the parents, environment, self-determination and free will determine the path of this new soul. When a life ends this existence, it returns to G-d and takes up a place that is similar in intensity to what has now been created. It is the reason those who have had a near death experience describe seeing a light and former relatives and friends. They would have a similar intensity.

One of those nagging questions about creation is that first there was Nothing, a Void and then G-d said, "Let there be Light and there was Light." Where did it come from? Again the Kabala provides a kind of answer. Keeping in mind that Man was created in G-d's image, the same question can be asked of us. When you come up with an idea, where does it come from? It comes from Nothing, a Void, and then it exists. How do you explain it? Once the idea comes forth it is formulated, planned, adjusted, organized, solidified, and then brought to 'life,' existence. It is evaluated, admired, adjusted, and reviewed.

Think of a child with clay. He comes up with an idea, shapes it, and creates. If he likes it he keeps it, if not, he tears it down and starts again. The 'image of G-d' is a description of G-d's attributes not his physical appearance.

Along the same line, a two level puzzle can be found in Genesis Chapter 1 Line 26 and Line 27. On the first level, Line 26 G-d says, "Let's create man in our image, but in Line 27 He says, "in my image." Who was He talking to? No one had been created yet. Nothing was said about angels existing or being created. Again, one of my students, Michael Gootkin, came up with the most reasonable answer I've ever heard. The spirit in us is part of G-d. G-d was talking to all the souls that would be! That would also explain the change in Line 27 when G-d said "in my image." It would be interchangeable!

The second level of this puzzle is "created in my image." What image? G-d has no form never mind image. What is He talking about? Here the reference is not physical but has to do with capabilities to imagine, create, and to continue as well as finish the work started. If G-d is in all of us, then Creation still continues. We continue to shape our world and procreate. We continue to make Man, and we do it in our image. By teaching our children

all we know and providing them with the tools, ambitions, and desire to improve the world, Creation can be completed.

## G-d's Song

Those of us that have had the opportunity to study Torah, know that the Torah was meant to be sung. Those congregations that can afford it will hire cantors that are operatically trained. Not to long ago I was training a student when I explained to her how the note pattern played an important part of conveying the meaning of the words. It put more emphasis on the important words of the sentence. It helped with the phrasing, and it made it easier to learn.

Having said that, a very interesting question came to mind. "I wonder if G-d sang the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai?" If he did, what 'voice' did he use? Was it a deep contra baritone or a soprano? Did he sing in multiple voices creating a harmony? Did he do a mixed voice depending on the phrasing, so sometimes it was a tenor or an alto? What tonality did he use? Did he have angels as backup harmonizing? What role did music play?

As I look at his creation, I realize that music plays an extremely important part. We could talk about the birds certainly, but what about the whales or porpoises? Until recently, we didn't know that elephants could produce sounds so low that we couldn't hear them, but other elephants could hear them 5 miles away.

But it's not just animals that produce sound. The whole universe does. Scientists learned the song of our Sun. From its song they can predict solar storms.

If all that is true, what does it say about us? What if we can't sing on key? What if we don't harmonize well? What if we walk to the beat of a different drummer? What then?

We've long known that music can affect our mood, our heart rate; it can even cause us to go insane. We've found that it can have an affect on animals ... even plants! Is music the true universal language? Is it G-d's song?

I have been involved in music most of my life. I've played in bands, orchestras, and ensembles. I've sung in choirs, choruses, shows, and synagogues. I've sung as part of a group, as part of a duet and solo. I love to sing. There is something therapeutic in the process. There are times when my voice can take me soaring (maybe not anyone else). There are also very magical moments when I can actually resonate with another singer. It gives me goose bumps it's so powerful. Can you understand when I say resonant? I mean I can actually feel the vibrations through my body. I really do feel the harmony. Unfortunately it doesn't happen often. If I could sing on key it would help.

But the part that really fascinates me is when we sing as a congregation. Somehow it doesn't seem like anyone is off key. It all blends. We become one, one voice, one purpose, one song. It truly is special.

Now I'm not saying that there isn't joy singing by oneself. Sometimes we need that expression. But the joy of singing and being together is a way of feeling more complete. It allows us to support each other and the courage to truly sing. Not in a meek voice but with all our being. What a truly special experience. Maybe that's why G-d said we need to have a minyan. Ten is just enough to give us courage so we don't feel exposed. Maybe ten is the number that can cover up our feelings of inadequacies and give us the freedom to soar.

I invite all of you to come soar with us Friday nights or Saturday mornings. Let us provide the cover so you can have the freedom to be a soloist in disguise. Come study with us and learn G-d's song.

## **KABALA - JACOB'S LADDER**

The Tree of Life has another name, Jacob's Ladder. As the story goes, Jacob had gone to make a sacrifice to G-d. When he was done, he laid down and put his head on a rock and fell asleep. While sleeping he had a dream. He saw a ladder extending from the earth to the heavens with angels ascending and descending. He then started wrestling with a stranger. It lasted all night and when morning came he had won the match even though he had dislocated his hip. As victor he was given a new name, Israel, and shown the lands that his descendants would inherit and the promise they would become a great nation.

When growing up we are all faced with the challenge of deciding what ideals our parents have taught us we accept and choose to live by. I believe that dream was what Jacob was wrestling with. He saw the Tree of Life in the form of a ladder instead of a tree. It showed the connection between G-d and man. The angels are a manifestation of G-d's commands and carry those messages back and forth between earth and heaven. He wrestled with that concept through the night, trying to understand. In his thrashing about he dislocated his hip. When he awoke he had resolved this inner conflict and understood what he saw in his dream. He accepted the beliefs of his father and made them his own. He now had a purpose and a way of living his life that was different from his youth. Remember he was the brother that did a lot of studying and always seemed to get what he wanted, through deceit if necessary. That all changed once he understood G-d's plan and could get focused.

Nowadays we have found another 'Jacob's Ladder;' it is DNA. It is a physical manifestation of how we were created and provides the blueprint for human life. In a sense it provides us with a road map back to our origin (much like the one described in Star Trek the Next Generation).

## **Still Born or Deformed**

Trying to explain a still birth to a young child is difficult. The joy and anticipation of a new sibling, to have it snatched away, to see the anguish of the parents, can be hard to deal with. The first reaction is to lash out, to put blame somewhere. Was it mom's fault, dad's fault, or maybe it was G-d's fault.

The most successful way I've found is through images a child is already familiar. I've asked the child to look at a forest with many trees. Imagine that just before you came to this scene, a branch with five leaves falls from one of the trees. Would you be able to tell the difference? Would the forest look the same? Whether you looked from a place high in the sky, or walked in the forest, you wouldn't notice the difference. There are so many pieces to the forest, such a small piece missing would go unnoticed unless it allowed something else to happen that was harmful, like a lit match not being deflected and landing on some dry brush. Then it was too late. The forest would burn down.

When a life is formed it has three contributors, a man, a woman, and G-d. There are so many pieces, it would be like all the leaves and branches in the forest. One leaf or small branch lost or damaged could easily go unnoticed whether looked at from the sky or on the ground. But the part G-d puts in is a part of G-d. He is part of us, and we are a part of him. If He can't keep in contact with that part, it contracts, it pulls back to G-d and the life can't continue or sometimes even start. It's not mom's fault, or dad's, or even G-d's. Everyone is sad.

## Defining Good and Evil

One area that has always caused a problem is the concept of Good and Evil. We have often talked of the need for Evil as a balance or a way of knowing what Good is. That is an incorrect image. Think back to the description of Creation when G-d contracted to make room for what he would create. So too, before an idea comes forth or a great leap forward, there is a 'contraction' of Good. Every thought, idea, construction involves destruction. Something is always destroyed even if it is just silence and nothingness, because now there is something. Emptiness is destroyed.

So what is Good and what is Evil? A very straightforward answer would be, all that happens that allows Creation to be completed is Good. Everything else, including doing nothing is Evil.

Go back to G-d's description of who He is, 'I Am That I Am.' THINGS ARE, period. How they are used is the determination of Good or Evil. The same is true of all our actions. Look at the various commandments. Not killing or not stealing, honoring your parents are all prescribed by G-d. Yet we can, and have justified breaking all these commandments, protecting our family, our nation or ourselves. So if Evil is relative, then what happens to an 'evil soul?' Using the analogy of light, we would find those souls strongest at fulfilling G-d's will being closest to the Source, and those souls unwilling furthest away. They would be the dimmest part, but still part of the light. When painting, you need the full spectrum. So does G-d's Creation.

I once had a tenant, Theodore Korecki, who was an artist. While he was painting, I would sometimes watch him work, and we would talk. One day I had to break up a fight between some children playing. When I returned, I sat down and said, "Wouldn't it be nice if everyone was the same? Then we would all get along."

"No," he replied most emphatically. "I'm an artist. Imagine if the only color I had on my palette was green. I need all the colors and shades or I'd have no way of expressing my art."

In the same way G-d needs people of all beliefs and viewpoints. Each has its purpose and place, even if it is to provide counterpoint so something can stand out.

During our life we take on the work of completing Creation. We make a contract with G-d, ourselves, and with others. They are called vows.

Every year, before Yom Kippur, we start to remember all our promises and vows. On Yom Kippur we cleanse our souls to start fresh. We talk about vows made between Man and Man, and we talk about vows made between Man and G-d. What we forgot to talk about is our vows we make to ourselves.

Early in life as we see the world unfold around us, we see certain things that help shape our lives. Sometimes we see things and want to emulate them such as a loving relationship, or a generous act ...

Other times we want to protect ourselves and insulate ourselves from the evil like hurting someone physically or emotionally...

Like anything there can be negative and/or positive results.

“I will never let anyone hurt me again.” So you close yourself off from ANY relationship. Or, ...

“If you hurt me, I will hurt you even worse.” Then you become the very kind of person you hate.

You can turn these into a positive. I recognize I can be hurt, but I would rather take a chance and be positive than to lose out on having love in my life.

I won't act hurtful because then that person will win and make it so I would hate what I'd become.

Sometimes we have to change or cancel that vow. (It's called therapy.) Sometimes we find we made a vow based on wrong or missing information, or maybe times have changed and the vow is no longer valid.

Be willing to change after very careful examination of the reasons why the vow was made, and what the new evidence is that is causing you to reconsider.

Choose carefully how you formulate your vows. Make sure that if your vow is kept you're happy with what you have accomplished.

There is a danger of vowing or dreaming too small. You might achieve your goal. That doesn't sound like a bad thing, and it's not if you have other dreams that continue to provide your life with meaning. But if all you have is one small goal, you may find yourself with a life with no purpose or meaning. Ted Turner's father passed that advice along to his son. He accomplished what he dreamed and then had nothing left to live for. Ted doesn't seem to have that problem. Can you imagine saying, “I want to make a difference in the world so I'm going to figure out how to donate a billion dollars to the UN relief fund!”

Don't be afraid to dream large (with the following caveat). Understand that the vow, the dream might require more than what you can do in the given time frame. Keep in mind that it's okay to share a dream and accomplish the goal together. In fact that's a good thing. You end up not only making your life meaningful but others as well. But also remember that the important part is to try and work towards that dream. THAT is the vow.

***REMEMBER, THE PURPOSE OF LIFE IS TO HAVE A LIFE WITH PURPOSE.***

## Why There Can't Be a Satan

If G-d created everything, and there is only one G-d, then there can't be a Satan with attributes currently held. The reason is simple. As soon as Satan is portrayed as G-d's opposite, he becomes elevated to a god. By definition who can compete with a Supreme Being?

In old Jewish lore, Satan was an angel whose job was as the prosecutor of souls that had returned for judgment. Keeping in mind that each soul is responsible for completing Creation, Tikun Olam, a review conducted would evaluate whether the job was done. The prosecutor was responsible for listing the negative. Angels are manifestations of G-d's commands, they can do nothing else. Changing Satan's description elevates him to a level that can't exist.

In the same way, an Apocalypse would be an evaluation of Creation. Was the job completed? Did it turn out the way G-d intended. If it is, it gets elevated, if not it is destroyed. This is not much different than any work an artist has worked on. He would work hard on a masterpiece. If it works out fine, 'it's a keeper,' if not it is destroyed and the artist starts again.

Who decides? The Artist.

## What Kind of Parent Are You?

Can you imagine being a parent who says, “I want you to have a room in this house all to yourself, you have to kill whoever is in that room to get it?”

As I look at Judaism and other religions I have a problem with contradictions. I can't imagine a parent saying they regret a punishment and won't do it again, and then asks *you* to do it. Certainly that is the case of the Flood and entering the Promised Land. G-d made a commandment that forbids killing, and yet He tells the Jewish people they must kill the inhabitants of the Holy Land. Not only that, but when they show mercy to children, they're punished for it!

In Christianity the problem is even more pronounced. A parent brings a child into the world so he can be sacrificed? Even in modern times we have criticized parents who purposely brought a child into the world so they could harvest organs for a sick sibling. G-d stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, to set the tone about human sacrifice. It is forbidden. Along the same line, G-d is capable of creating a human. He created Adam. Why put an innocent woman through the trauma of becoming impregnated with a child that is not her husband's? Is that not breaking another commandment?

If we are created in 'G-d's image,' what does that say about us as parents? Are we wrong thinking our child is innocent and just needs guidance? What does it say about the G-d we pray to? Does he want a 'junior partner' to help him finish Creation, or a parent who is ashamed of what He's made and wants to distance Himself? Is he so ashamed with his creation he needs an intermediary to even hear us?

We are part of G-d and G-d is part of us. The link is direct. “Whenever something is created, something is destroyed.” The reality from our point of view, on our scale, can seem harsh. We have to grow as an individual and as a people to see the whole finished puzzle.

## **What Are We ‘Chosen’ For?**

There is a misperception about the concept of the ‘Chosen People.’ It doesn’t mean “G-d likes us best.” It means we have chosen to take a more difficult path to achieve our goal. We take on a higher standard to achieve our end result. The best comparison is taking a required course in school. There are those who do what is necessary to pass and get the course over with. Some students, however, decide that there is a reason the course is required and work hard at getting all they can out of the course. That student isn’t willing to accept a ‘C’ and just get by; he wants an ‘A’ and to find out why the course is required. Both pass the course. Both fulfill the requirements. So why bother?

The answer is a question. If the students were doctors, which would you rather have treating you? The one who just gets by and collects his fee, or the doctor who thinks every detail of taking care of you is important. Nothing is left to chance.

## The Purpose of Religious Ritual

Life is hectic at best. To try and include extra responsibilities and things to do, just makes life harder. It's just not relevant any more. People are now looking at women working, people holding two jobs, and for some, if they want to keep their job, they must work on Saturday. Some of the ritual seems to be outdated. Driving cars and using electricity on Shabbat come to mind. What purpose does it serve? What criteria should we use to evaluate importance?

Ritual and prescribed prayers serve a couple of purposes. It is a way of teaching and of providing structure. The repetition of ritual ingrains in us a way of living. The study of Torah and Talmud ingrains a way of thinking that respects others and all life forms. We can use them as starting points, a common bond and reference point for studies on an intellectual level. It also provides us with a structure and response in crisis situations as well as our everyday life. What do you say or do when a loved one is sick or has passed away? There is a ritual and a prayer for that. The same is true before and after you eat, before or after a journey, even before and after studying! All have prescribed prayers to help you with life and remind you what the Creator has given you.

For some, this is too much. They just don't connect with the ritual. For others it's just a starting point. Why? It could be they don't see a need or they don't understand its purpose. Before you decide how you feel, take the time to get the background of the ritual or prayer. I know I sometimes found some of the prayers incompatible with my feelings. Talking about 'fearing' G-d would be an example. If G-d was within me I'd be afraid of myself. But if I changed the word from 'fear' to 'awe,' it made sense. The idea of a G-d that was vengeful didn't work for me. Realizing there are consequences to my actions did. We see that in science all the time.

Sometimes I just can't find the words to express myself. Having millions of people writing down their thoughts before me helps me find the words. Somebody had similar experiences and found the words. But there are those times words just get in the way. Then I need to just think and feel. The message will get through.

Prescribed prayers and rituals serve another purpose. They bind us together. They allow us to feel part of something bigger and that we are not alone. They bring comfort to those in need. They give us a starting point during awkward times. When you move into a new town, attending a service gives you a starting point to get acquainted. You can start by talking about what is the same and what is different in the service. Once a bond is established everything seems to become easier and possible. You have people to share good news with or, if you need help, it is easier to ask a friend than a stranger. Taking on big projects is easier done with friends. So is repairing the world!

## MY HUMAN PUZZLE

I've been trying to put this puzzle together for years. You probably have too. It finally dawned on me that I am just a piece of the puzzle and that alone, I am not the solution. Unfortunately, as part of the puzzle, I can't step back far enough to get the whole picture. Perhaps if I share what I know from my perspective, my piece of the puzzle, and you share yours, we can find where our pieces of the puzzle fit and we can get a glimpse of the 'Big Picture.'

In order to do this, it will be necessary to explore the various parts of the puzzle. It's like examining which slot fits into which groove and which color patterns go together to make up a particular pattern of the picture.

We'll start with the Individual. This is hardly the easiest place to start, but we have to identify the 'shape' of this piece in order to explore how other pieces are going to fit. Then we will explore the Family and its role, benefit, and need to the Individual. Next we will explore how the individual and family fit into the neighborhood or community. We will also explore the responsibilities and rewards of each. Finally we will try and draw up a big mirror and try to position it so we might see the Whole Picture.

When we finish exploring the pieces and the picture, maybe we can better understand why there is such a diversity of ideas, purposes and needs. We might even be willing to recognize the importance of the pieces and accept them for what they are.

### THE INDIVIDUAL

What a complex thing we humans are. We always start with the individual. From the time we are infants, it's always what WE want. We fight for our identity, our oneness. At the same time we recognize the need to belong, to be part of a larger group. Then we can say "I'm no different than you. Let's be friends." Recognizing that our world has some harsh terms in order to survive, and we are not equipped to handle it by ourselves, we spend our lives trying to balance the two. We try to fit in without losing ourselves and our identity. It is a puzzle. Actually, it's a puzzle within a puzzle. It's easy to forget that the other pieces have to fit also, and they're trying to do the same thing.

Let's take a step back and see if we can fit these two pieces of the puzzle together.

As an individual, there is one overriding purpose for our existence, to survive. Our survival is the basis for all we do. What we haven't explored is which is more important, survival of the individual or the species? In other words, is it more important that the individual survive, or, should we be willing to give up our life for the good of mankind? We could go round and round on this question. We could give ample examples to backup those claims. We could find various cultural and religious beliefs to document either claim.

Let's start with human instinct. If someone comes after you with a weapon, or just an

expression that we interpret as dangerous, we run or position ourselves to defend ourselves. We don't wait and ask his motives, we look to survive first, and then we can worry about motives. Simpler cultures, and even our own early settlements recognized that the individual always had the right to choose. If a man did not like what was going on in his area, he could choose to stay and try to convince the group, accept the way things were, or he could pick up his family and move into the next valley. Even our constitution protects the individual as an important part of the country, by protecting his individual rights in the "Bill of Rights." There he is guaranteed the right to speak his mind, pray as he chooses, and do what makes him happy as long as it doesn't hurt others. Even the major religions recognize the importance of the individual. The western religions represented by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all talk of the idea of Man being given free choice. The eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism talk of the idea of the importance of a drop of water to the river. If enough drops are removed, the river becomes a stream, and the stream can dry up and no longer exist.

No group can exist without individuals. For the group to survive requires the individuals in the group to strive toward the same goal. The obvious comparison would be a sports team. A team may have great individual players, but without the support of each individual, the team has little chance of winning. Even sports that we usually think of as individual sports such as tennis or golf, require a team. The team may not be on the playing field, but it is important. The coach, the trainer, the caddy, the business manager, the secretary, whomever, allows the athlete to perform at his best.

Going in the other direction, we can equally show the importance of the group over the individual. Socialism and communism talk of their relationship. The whole is more important than the individual. It is for the common good one should try to strive, the individual should gain his reward as part of the whole. We can look at primitive cultures where those who would place a burden on the survival of the group are expected to sacrifice for the good of the group. Think in terms of the elderly or the crippled who are left to die because they can't keep up and contribute to the group. Our own society has placed many of these people in a 'warehouse' and out of the main stream. The Declaration of Independence talks of the rights of a group to splinter from the king because he didn't fulfill the needs of the group. Even eastern religions talk in terms of understanding Man's place in the universe. For each individual to remember he is part of the whole, and as such, should respect all life forms as he would a human.

In order for the group to survive it needs the individual. In order for the individual to survive he needs the group. It is not an either or answer; it is both. This is not a contradiction. It is the place where these two pieces of the puzzle fit together. Remember the Tree of Life. We are in that part that carries out G-d's creation. We are the part of G-d that are 'the hands.' The wrinkle is free will. We can modify and create as well as carry out the original intent as we progress. We must survive in order to do G-d's work. We are the part of G-d assigned to finish Creation. Once we're dead we can't help. It is necessary to recognize this aspect in order to respect each position, and move on to the next part of the puzzle.

After the recognition of 'I', comes the 'We'. Man and Woman. They are the next part to our foundation. I recognize that some people work better by themselves, and that others prefer the same sex. However for the group, its survival still depends on the unity of a man and a woman. We can certainly try to make a case for the individual, the person who makes it on his own. Maybe he's a computer programmer, inventor, artist, musician, or writer. These people do make contributions to the Group and they may be self-sufficient, but few of them live in a vacuum. They still look for human companionship, either on a personal level, or if for no other reason than to appreciate what they have done.

There can be alternate lifestyles that can fulfill the needs of the individuals involved, but, if we consider the whole picture, we wouldn't exist if that lifestyle was the dominant. It would offer an interesting alternate premise. If Man/Man, Woman/Woman relationships were the norm, what would be its effect? The population would certainly go down, more food and space would be available, and in fact may make survival for all easier. Although this sounds desirable on the surface, the problem comes from having smaller and smaller gene pools. This in turn could lead to extinction not survival.

We, therefore, return to our original premise with a Man/Woman relationship. Let us consider then, if the individual is the 'footings' of our structure, the family unit is the foundation. Let's explore how to build that foundation.

## THE FAMILY

Depending on the society, or even the times, the role of man and woman keeps changing. We are at a time when not only are both capable of being the 'breadwinner' but, both need to work. This requires division of all roles in a marriage to be adjusted. That would include cooking, cleaning, laundry, dishes, maintenance, and bookkeeping.

It's interesting to explore possible reasons why certain customs arose. If we look at early man, we certainly find the need for a strong family unit. Basic survival was at stake. Being practical, if a woman was pregnant or just recently had a child, she was in no condition to hunt. She could gather roots and berries while watching the child, but certainly not hunt. The woman was the source of food for the baby. If anything happened to her, the baby would die also. She became the focus of concern. She couldn't be risked and had to be protected. The man was the logical choice for the hunt. Notice I didn't say anything about strength or intelligence or any other weak excuse that the macho man felt necessary to use to describe his importance. The fact was, of the two, he was the most expendable. Some societies seemed to try and balance those facts with the ability to hunt and provide for more than one wife. This became a status symbol and allowed the men to wrest the leadership role from the women. In many cultures this then became the norm. With men doing the hunting and fighting, woman were relegated to hearth and home.

But this was not exactly true. These distinct roles seem to change to become just guidelines when we look at just a pair instead of a group. Not only that, but as times changed and the method for obtaining food changed ,i.e. farming instead of hunting/gathering, it is interesting to note the roles were not dropped. It's as if men were

afraid women were going to find out that men weren't as important as men (or as men think they are). Maybe that is a bit much. In all likelihood there just wasn't the pressure to force society to change, so it didn't.

If we look at more modern times, we see the reexamining of the woman's role during the second World War. The economy was placed in a squeeze. With the men off to war, there was a workforce needed to run the factories. Women were rediscovered. Slowly we started working our way back toward equality.

We need to recognize that the ability to survive requires a new definition and new requirements for the role of the sexes. We need to stop trying to find out or pointing to deficiencies and start working in harmony and support of each other.

The determining factor has to be survival requirements. The fundamental purpose of the union is survival. If the wife is the primary breadwinner, at a job that requires long hours, the primary responsibility for the house chores should be the man's (If the roles are reversed so should the responsibilities). If the income earnings are split, so should the chores. Each should do what they do best. The balance of the chores should be split.

A very important decision has to be made early in the relationship. Who will make the final decision? It doesn't have to be the same person for each area, but one person has to take the responsibility. I'm not talking about what to have for supper, although that could be an issue, I'm talking about where do you live, or where will the children go to school or how many? These are important questions that require both discussion and a chance to formulate a direction. But sometimes, even after compromise, one partner has to make the final decision and the other will have to go along.

He wants two children. She wants three or four. Both sides present their views. He says the cost of raising that many children would be prohibitive. They wouldn't be able to give them the jump start that they would need to make it in this world. They wouldn't be able to give them the attention they would like. He would have trouble having that many kids running around. She felt having other kids around is an important part of growing up. This would help them learn to get along and be there later in life to support each other even after the parents were no longer around. If something should happen to the parents in their old age, the burden could be spread among more people cutting down on the strain. She couldn't imagine a home with so few people to share life's experiences. Remember you both have to live with the results.

Another common area is birth control. What method to use, or if you should use any method at all. Suppose both of you decide not to have any more children or no children. If you're looking to decide who is going to have what done, who makes the final decision?

These are tough decisions. The burden can be very heavy. Someone has to take responsibility.

If survival is the primary purpose of life, then procreation has to be an important issue. With humans in our society there are several aspects to consider. Sexual needs, companionship, respect of a partner as a person, frequency, and boundaries. Sexual needs not only include when to have sex, but what is permissible, where it's okay, and when a partner should be left alone. The latter being a very important reminder that your partner is a human being not an object of your whims. Sex should be equally pleasurable, a reward for both, not an obligation.

How many books have been written on the subject? It seems to be one of those areas that should be so basic that the answers should be simple, but they're not.

Some people are party people, some are loners, and others fit in between. It's a tough area to mesh. Some people prefer day, while others like the night life. If both are loners, no problem. If they aren't, some serious negotiating needs to take place prior to commitment, or be prepared for serious battles.

It is always nice when there is agreement; however, sometimes what you need is another point of view. It's not always in your best interest to have someone who is always in agreement. And sometimes the right answer comes from a compromise that is the result of all out battles.

One of the two areas where this most frequently occurs is in money matters. The best way to avoid the more serious consequences of lack of trust or humiliation is to have the debate about priorities before your backs are against the wall. Set up a budget that you can both agree on. 'Whatever you want to do dear,' is not the kind of budget I'm talking about. I mean a conscious, well-considered budget that takes the needs and priorities of both people into account. Deciding whether to make the car payment or pay the electric bill, as an example. Should we buy a new house or take a vacation? These are the kind of things that should be budgeted for ahead of time.

No matter how carefully you budget, something unexpected always comes up. Have your priorities set beforehand. Somebody can always get seriously ill or laid off. Setting those priorities will reduce the stress and keep both of you on the same team. As in the case of sexual needs, the same considerations apply. Both peoples' needs have to be considered.

Work helps define us. We have to be clear about our goals in life in order to be clear about our goals for work. The danger comes when work becomes the lifegoal of one, without the support of the spouse. An equal problem arises when the life's work is all consuming for each, and they are pulled in opposite directions.

Imagine one partner deciding to dedicate their life's work to the noble cause of helping the poor, or dying, or the very young. Now the spouse has due respect for the life's mission but wants time together, away from the cause. If work is all they are, they won't have much to share that is apart from work. It would be much better if that was recognized and dealt with before the relationship got too far and people were hurt.

Up to this point we have talked about survival being the primary goal. But there is a secondary goal that is also in need of consideration, quality of life.

Work is a requirement for survival. It is the means by which we acquire food, clothing, and shelter. It is important. But it is necessary to recognize it as only a piece of our individual puzzle. Certainly accommodations have to be made for work, but a line must be drawn. That line includes personal needs ( I can't stand this job!) and the family unit's greater good ( We have to move to a drier climate). That is the quality of life and work that has to go into your decision-making process.

***WORK SHOULD BE FULFILLING BUT NOT ALL CONSUMING.***

The world is a difficult place. To have family for help is important, but not as important as that special someone that you have chosen and has chosen you. Together you plan your future for making it in this world. The misunderstanding comes when you look at what you have accumulated as the criteria for having 'made it.' The true measure is 'how did you get there?' It is essential that your partner share your methodology for survival. It doesn't mean you always need to agree, but you need to at least be going in the same direction. Are you looking at marriage as a way to cut down expenses? Do you want a partner to help you accumulate more wealth or maybe to co-explore the world around you? How about someone to lead you toward achieving a philosophic goal? Perhaps you need someone to support your attempt toward reaching a goal. Do you want a co-leader to help you organize or a follower? You need to know those expectations or you're destined to failure.

It use to be that the purpose of marriage was for procreation. As man improved on his survival skills it started to become a political or economic alliance. Neither is true now. For some people children are no longer considered as a reason to get married. Before proceeding, both parties need to be really clear about their feelings on the matter. They have to make sure it is not a short-term decision. Sometimes the decision is out of their hands and they find out they can't have children. Realistically though, people change their minds . It is necessary as a couple to reach agreement as to the importance of having children and how many.

The next task comes if you decide to have children. Together you must decide what values you want to pass along. How are you going to share the responsibility for the child's upbringing. Both parents provide various, important role models. The children will try various aspects of those roles, so both have to be careful of their actions. Always remember, children are people. They are capable of interpreting anything done in a variety of ways. It's the old 'glass half full or half empty' interpretation of actions. You may see it one way, and the child sees something else. In any situation there are at least two lessons learned. The first lesson may or may not teach the child what you want. The second lesson will be learned. That lesson deals with how you convey the message and what your response is when the lesson is either learned or not.

It's not enough for a couple to have the same religion. The beliefs and outlook need to be

compatible. The importance of religion has to be shared and so must the commitment. Remember lip service isn't enough. The commitment has to be by example.

A marriage is nothing but existence without friendship and trust. If your spouse isn't your best friend and someone you can completely trust, you both lose.

The world is tough enough. You absolutely cannot have your survival undermined by doubt. It just adds too much burden to an already difficult situation. Once roles have been determined, you must act as a team. There has to be support for each other's actions. The goal has to be the same. Putting these two pieces together (the individual and life partner) is the toughest and the most critical. Without this combination it is not likely the rest of the puzzle will fall into place. Fit the pieces together carefully.

Of paramount importance is to keep your purpose in mind - first survival, second quality of life. Let's explore those ideas as they apply to the family. Both parents have the need for individual fulfillment. If procreation is part of this, then the responsibility that goes with it has to be a priority. It requires the shifting of schedules and more important, attitudes towards priorities. It is YOUR job as a parent to raise YOUR child. You need to teach him/her how to survive, find a purpose, and fulfillment.

It was easy to do in a primitive society. The child was taught how to gather food, find or construct a shelter, and get along as part of a group. The parents taught these things at an early age. Parents could never be sure how long they would live. Children had to learn to survive as early as possible. Remember people got married in their early teens and started a family right away. Survival of the individual was dependent on survival of the family. Children knew that what they were doing was important for survival in a very real sense. Lessons had to be learned or they could be permanently injured or die. There was respect for knowledge because knowledge meant survival. That soon translated into respect for the possessor of knowledge. He would become the leader. He was Survival.

Parents need to recognize this role in themselves. It shouldn't be abdicated to others, only enhanced by them. This means schools should be there to enhance the education of your child, not be your replacement.

We acknowledge that there are other people better qualified to do certain tasks. We also acknowledge that a group can accomplish certain things that an individual can't. Knowing that, we must fit our family piece of the puzzle into the community piece in order to better assure survival and quality of life.

The schools are one place children learn to deal with these issues, but they shouldn't be the only place. Groups like the Scouts, 4-H, DeMolay/Rainbow, and Church groups, are all places to learn how to contribute and share.

Parents should also set an example of contributing to the community. It can take the form of politics, volunteer work, or any kind of activity that gets the family involved with the community. This should also include something of a spiritual nature. It can take the form

of a recognized religious group, or nonsectarian sharing with others into the spiritual nature of man. The whole concept of life and death is hard for adults, let alone children, to fathom. The added input from others can help the individual develop and strengthen their own beliefs.

## THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY

In education we keep hearing the cry to get back to basics. I think the problem is we don't get Basic enough. Let's go back to our original premise, that is survival and quality of life.

We need to educate our children in some pretty basic things. Proper nutrition, how to stay fit, how to be part of a group, how to provide clothing and shelter, how to find work that is personally rewarding and fulfilling, and how to appreciate the arts and explore our own creativity. The teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic shouldn't be the focus, but the tools to accomplish our goals. Students will learn their numbers if they identify a purpose for their need. Students will learn to read, if they decide it's important.

In 1980, the first computer arrived at our school. We as teachers debated whether or not it was more important to teach programming or computer applications. Each had its merit. Teaching programming gave discipline and structure to problem solving. It promoted learning through trial and error. It made it alright to make a mistake and keep on trying. Computer applications taught students how to use the computer as a tool to accomplish large tasks more effectively. Using word processing, data bases, and spreadsheets allowed them to learn and understand at a deeper level.

While that debate continued, we saw a remarkable thing, students learned according to what they thought was important. If a student decided that programming was important, then he would spend hours learning how to program. He didn't accept being stuck as anything more than an obstacle. It certainly wasn't a wall. He would call on friends, or ask the teacher or just keep trying until he got what he was after. If applications were the important goal, then the student would spend the time to learn those aspects necessary to use the particular program. You can understand our shock. We're talking about the same students who would try to study for a history test, and if they couldn't learn the lesson the first time through, they called themselves stupid and quit, never to try again. What was the difference?

I got the answer to my question a few years later. I moved from the middle school to the high school to start teaching remedial math and computer applications. Most of the 88 remedial students I had taught in middle school. The things they were having trouble with now were the same topics they had trouble with back then, namely fractions, decimals, and percents. One thing changed though. I was in the process of working with a group to buy the local factory. My picture had been on the front page of the local paper. These students, some who were in the process of dropping out, came up with the idea that if I said it was important, it must be. After, all, I could be their future employer. Within the first semester, 40 students tested out of the remedial program. They were the same

people, and I was the same teacher. The only difference was now they had a purpose for learning the material.

This solution was reaffirmed in the computer applications classes. Students who had never operated a computer before but had taken typing, learned the basics of how to use a word processing program in 45 minutes. The English teachers really got into it when they saw students willing to edit and redo their papers. The computers made changing their work easier and less like starting all over. They also started taking pride in their work. They started coming in during study hall so they could turn in a better quality paper, one they could be proud to put their names on. It wasn't a big step to then get students to start checking spelling and punctuation. Their grades started to improve. They started thinking better of themselves. It was amazing!

The next reaffirmation came a few years later when I went back to teaching fifth grade. I decided to find out if what I had learned in high school would hold for younger students. It did through projects such as building a model house, designing a shopping mall, or an underwater city, or learning film making or learning to make web pages. Once the students owned the idea, they did whatever it took to achieve their goal.

This concept could be taken one step further. There was a program in the state called the Invention Convention. Students from all grade levels, some as young as first grade, came up with original ideas for solving problems they saw. Some of these ideas were so good that companies were showing up and buying the ideas. One idea took the lid from a tennis ball can. The student cut a notch, put a small piece of screen over the notch, and now had a lid for a soda can that would keep yellow jacks out of the open can when on a picnic.

What a bonanza that would be for any area if the kids became a new kind of resource. It would certainly change minds as to whether investing in schools were a benefit to them. Suppose some communities could start reemploying the unemployed. It would also help develop a better sense of community and a respect for children as people. All would benefit.

We should keep in mind, at one time 13 and 14 years-old were the ages for getting married and having a family. Our society, as well as the demand for more and more training, have kept these people out of the work force. Perhaps more work/study programs would be a better way of going. It would help the student, cut down the need for space and require fewer classroom teachers. As the students rotated through the program, they would get first-hand experience in the workplace, help the family, save for college, or whatever the family or individual needs might be. One could even consider a part of the earnings to reimburse the town for their own education. This would relieve some of the tax burden to the town and strengthen the importance of education to the student. As a follow up, students should include some kind of service to the larger community, such as the Peace Corps, Vista, or the military.

Today's society is constantly changing. Our educational system must keep up. Physical

fitness, art, and music must be a part of that process. They provide thinking and creative skills that can't be taught any other way. They strengthen the brain as well as provide an outlet for our creative process. These programs should be integrated into other programs. They don't have to be stand alones. I had students take a moment in history, invent characters, and come up with a story using history as the timeline. They learned about writing a paragraph, developing a character, history, and doing research. They then posted the story on the web, so they learned how to make a web page, and set each chapter to music, so they learned music appreciation. One group wrote and recorded original compositions to go with their chapter. Others did their own art work. Still others turned the story into a play and performed in front of the school. Was it an art lesson, history lesson, maybe a music lesson, or was it writing or reading or theater? A subject doesn't have to be pigeon-holed. It can be taught in context. Education has to be looked at as an ongoing process. Important concepts and topics need to be integrated and provided with support groups built in. These groups might include drug dependency, being a parent, career choices, death and dying, marriage issues, or fitness groups. This concept would accomplish a couple of things. First it would keep people thinking of ongoing education. When new ideas come about, they would be in the right frame of mind to learn something new and not be afraid of the new idea. Second, it would provide a framework for strengthening the community through the support groups. A lot of tension can be relieved if you know you have neighbors to help.

Religion plays an important part of our makeup understanding how we fit into the scheme of things, providing a moral center, and it helps us with a framework for dealing with the world around us, our neighbors, as well as a measuring stick for ourselves. Which religion is 'right'? Why have religion at all? It is easy to find flaws in each of the faiths. Unless you accept your faith absolutely, all the questions don't have answers.

The problem seems to be consistent through all religions and all philosophies. Following the arguments of any of the famous philosophers such as Socrates, Descartes, Marx, or Sartre always leads to a place where the logic doesn't work. They start off great, but if you follow the premise to its logical conclusion, it falls apart. That's why none of them have been accepted by everyone. Think of all the pain and death caused by the struggle to impose a particular point of view. How absolutely contradictory to the proposed beliefs!

Sometimes we get so busy studying the details we forget that there is a larger picture. It's like studying the shape of a single piece of a puzzle. The single piece becomes the entire focus, and we forget that we are trying to put a puzzle together. We need to provide space for other beliefs that are different from ours.

When talking to groups with different beliefs, I always start with having one person from each group come up to the front of the room and stand between the audience and myself, turn and face each other. Then I ask them to answer a question as quickly as possible out loud at the same time. The question, "Which side am I on?" One person says I'm on the right, the other says the left. Then I ask the audience which person was correct? Obviously both are correct. That realization breaks down the first barrier of understanding.

Once we recognize that it is possible to have more than one right answer, we are more open to listen to the others point of view. The different views become less threatening. Remember Rev. DeQuattro's hologram. There is a need to get every perspective to get the real picture. One perspective, one color, doesn't make the picture. For our understanding of a problem, for our puzzle to start to make sense, we need all the colors, all the points of view, and, therefore, all the religions. Buddhism takes the beliefs of Hinduism and adds the interpretations of Buddha. From Judaism and the Old Testament, Christianity adds the New Testament, and Islam adds the Koran to that. If we examine the basic teachings of the foundation religions Hinduism and Judaism, we come up with a remarkable discovery. Take away all the trappings and manmade interpretations and customs, and you come down to an essence that is really easy to understand. On one side you have the Ten Commandments, on the other side you have the eight-fold path. Guess what they say. Don't kill. Don't steal. Treat others the way you wish to be treated. The rest is decoration. Each of these foundation religions allows for the freedom to live by your choices but with some basic guidelines that allow all to live. How simple. How beautiful. Each person and group has the right to choose their belief without prejudice, because they recognize that they each contribute to the whole picture. In short all are correct.

## THE LARGER GOVERNMENT

If we follow the natural progression that we have set up, individual to family, family to neighborhood, neighborhood to community, the next step would take us from community to a larger community.

Just as individuals have differences, so do groups. One of the primary purposes of the government is to act as mediator. The needs of the different groups need to be met, but not at the expense of one of the other groups.

It may be there aren't enough resources for both. If that is the case, it should not be set up so one time we fill my groups needs and next time yours. It should be set up in a time frame for fulfilling both. That way a group only has to look at a delay at fulfilling their needs not cancellation.

Sometimes the conflict centers around a need that will seriously damage another group's interest. This might include nuclear waste sites, trash reprocessing plants or any other industry or need that will change things forever. At this juncture it is important for all sides to not only voice their objection, but to offer legitimate alternatives. Speak from facts not from emotion.

Another cause for government intervention arises when a project is too big for a community to tackle on its own. The government, as mediator and coordinator, can help

organize an equitable sharing of resources with the group that benefits the most, contributes the most.

The government should be there to help the needs of its citizens, not impose its own dictates to enhance a few.

It also follows that there can be a lot of duplication. The government could act as coordinator. That would keep duplication to a minimum. Government could also coordinate co-ops for purchasing in bulk thus providing all with lower costs for things like schools, hospitals, and medicines.

Having different points of view is important. It provides different perspectives. It, therefore, becomes necessary to protect the rights of the individual as well as each group. Only through protecting those rights can there be the freedom to express ideas and explore the possibilities.

We have now come full circle. What have we learned about our puzzle? We have learned that the answers are simple and complex. In order to solve the puzzle, we need to look at each individual piece as well as the whole. Help is needed to find the pieces and to enable us to see the whole picture. It's similar to a human being, each cell existing and functioning on its own, but dependent and contributing to the existence of the whole.

Man, created in the image of G-d.

## **The Purpose of Life - The Short Version**

Finally, here are some areas to consider,

- 1) In your Personal life – What kind of person do you want to be?
- 2) With Family & Friends- What kind of friend do you want to be? Are the friends you have encouraging and helpful? Or, are they negative and condescending? What about your relationship with your family? Are they proud to have you as a relative or ashamed?
- 3) In Your community- Are you an active part of your community or just an observer?
- 4) In The world – Will you leave the world better than you found it?
- 5) In Your relationship with G-d. - Remember you are part of G-d and G-d is part of you. Respect that and remember it. If you always keep G-d in mind when you make your vows, and consider those vows with that light, your life will be good and full. Have a good day. You earned it. Have a good life. But you still have to Earn that.

One of the hard things for people to do sometimes is to figure out whether an action is right or wrong. Here are three guidelines.

- 1) Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- 2) What if everyone did it?
- 3) Be your own person. Don't let someone make you into someone you would dislike or even hate.

## **CONCLUSION**

Where do we go from here? Like the FSU website, we can go 'out' or we can go 'in.' We can even live right here, understanding G-d is in all those places. It is for each of us to finally decide which way to explore and fulfill our purpose.