



You're Not a Failure

Stop blaming yourself—You're Not a Failure! Once you realize that G-d is in the one in control, then you will start accepting yourself and your circumstances, confident in the knowledge that it all comes from G-d.

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF THE HOLY REBBE

RABBI NACHMAN FROM BRESLOV

AND HIS DISCIPLE THE HOLY TZADDIK

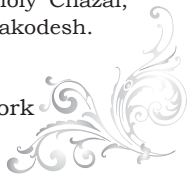
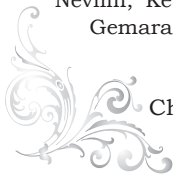
RABBI NOSSON FROM BRESLOV

AND ON THE TEACHINGS OF

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Published by
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You're Not a Failure



1.

Remember when you were a child and adults asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Do you recall how wide-eyed and eagerly you responded to that seemingly simple question? The future seemed so full of promise and life so easy. You couldn’t imagine that it would turn out so radically different; but it did. For many of us life seems like a dangling participle, a series of failed attempts, loose ends and unfinished projects; dashed hopes and broken

dreams. You say it wasn't supposed to be like that, but maybe not.

Dear friend, most of us feel like failures in life because we measure success according to our expectations and not G-d's. Although most of us would like to think we are masters of our destinies, it is not so. G-d in His infinite wisdom invisibly directs the events of our lives with our best interests in mind. If you are broken about the place you find yourself in life, don't be; you are where you ought to be, because G-d led you there. He knows better; this is faith, and faith leads to acceptance. Once you realize that G-d is in control and not you, then you will stop blaming yourself for being a failure. You will start accepting yourself and your circumstances, confident that it all comes from G-d.

Emotional Baggage:

“But I just can’t, I can’t let go of self-blame”. Why? What is making you feel so hopeless and depressed? Is it that somewhere deep down, you feel that your past actions have something to do with the suffering you’re undergoing now; and on some visceral level you feel that you’re a bad person, deserving of all that is happening to you? So, you believe that you’ve had a hand in bringing on all the sorrow, pain and confusion that you’re experiencing now. On a conscious level, this is what many of us believe, and this is the emotional baggage we carry around with us all day.

A Tale of Two Selves:

Human beings, however, are not static creatures. G-d gives us free-will to make choices in life, and sometimes we make

the right ones and sometimes we don't. Why? What's behind all the wavering? Why can't we just simply choose what's right and be good? The answer is that it's not so simple to be good, when a part of you doesn't want. Every person is a tale of two rival selves – one borne of the spirit and one borne of flesh. The former urges us to grow and mature; to rise above self-interest and connect to G-d through discipline and restraint, while the other keeps us captive in the grip of passionate and immature desires. During your waking moments and even while you sleep, your mind see-saws back and forth between choosing what you think you should do versus what you want to do. And what makes it even harder is that the answer is not always clear; thoughts are constantly swirling around in your head, as you weigh choices and try to predict outcomes. So, while on the outside you may attempt to appear calm

and collected, on the inside you're ambivalent and confused. Is it any wonder why you're struggling to cope, why you just can't put it together and why you feel constantly weighed down? Can this be the reason why your behavior patterns seem erratic, unstable and neurotic? Do you find yourself asking "Why am I so indecisive and scattered? Why can't I achieve peace and fulfillment in life and have healthy relationships?" What's the answer? What can you do?

Just Let It Be:

The first step towards getting a grip and begin healing your inner-self is to gain awareness. Let go of the guilt and stop beating yourself up. Accept yourself for who you are. "But I feel so conflicted and confused", you protest. The answer is: So what? Just let it be! Face it, there are parts of yourself that you may not

like and may never like but they are still a part of your make-up, so stop resisting. Look deeper, there is a set-up here that may not make sense to you, but it does to G-d. Your mind is still stuck in conventional modes of thinking that have you convinced, that G-d will only accept you if you're perfect. Not so! The reality is that G-d deliberately took a part of Himself, in the form of the soul, and placed it inside the crudeness of the human body and made you. G-d purposely created you, mixing flesh with the spirit, and then challenged you to find Him. Yes, He knows it's tough and maddening; with the soul pushing you upward and the body carrying you down, you don't know which way to turn, but that's the give. The challenge is to perceive G-d's invisible presence hidden in the earthly veneer, but this takes time and effort. And as long as you submit to your physical urges solely for the sake of

pleasure, and ignore the call of your soul, you'll continue to feel like a failure. G-d wants you to find Him in yourself; in your everyday life with all your shortcomings, urges, desires and failings. This entails going beyond the superficial, and looking deeper. The problem is that you get sidetracked by all your urges and the distractions of this world; focusing on the outside and not on the inside.

Corrective Lenses:

Okay, so I have to become more spiritual, religious, and to get to know G-d; that's what's stopping me from being successful and always feeling like a failure. But I don't feel that way? The other guy is an attorney, has his own IT business, drives a Navigator, he owns two homes, has a full financial portfolio, goes on vacations and his kids are all successful and I'm still stuck in a rut and

can't pay my bills. How do my failures have to do with not finding G-d? Remember years ago as a child, putting on those 3D glasses, and suddenly you saw the whole world differently. There was more depth, beauty and detail? Same here; without connection to G-d you're living only 2-dimensionally. You don't know what you're missing: but your soul does. So, on an unconscious level you're in a push me, pull you situation, going nowhere! That's the feeling of being stuck, and not knowing why. But, on some deeper level you do know why, but you don't want to admit it. Face it, we are all stubbornly attracted to the trendiest cars, the latest smartphones, our jobs and careers, fashion, fame and fortune and, we don't want to change. Why? Because we're afraid to change. Somehow, we have the sense that to let G-d in means giving-up all the things we

like; we push Him away so we can do our own thing.

The G-d Disconnect:

So, what's wrong with that? Why aren't we content with just doing what we want and trying to have it all? What's stopping you from moving on in life? Where is this sense of failure and disappointment coming from? Maybe you're finally waking-up to the realization that you do need G-d; that a life without Him in it, is a life without meaning. Yes, you may have failed, but not in the way you think; you didn't fail to get what you wanted, rather you failed to get what you needed; connection with G-d. Yes, you're glued to your ear-buds and listen incessantly to the beat of pop songs on your Ipod, you obsessively post on Facebook and Instagram to connect with family and friends, you're in constant

contact with your social network through WhatsApp, Twitter and other social media platforms – but where is your connection to G-d? You're hoping to succeed in life by making all the right connections, but you fail to make the one connection that can make all the difference – but, you have to know how.

The Soul Connection:

G-d is right here, everywhere and right next to you, but you're not seeing Him – but He wants you to; that's why He gave you a soul. But a soul connection isn't acquired with the ease of a smart-device nor does it operate in virtual reality; it requires only you, the real you being present; searching, yearning and longing for it. So, what's the problem; let me want it and let me get it, and feel fulfilled? The problem is us. We get in the way of our own success. G-d gives us free

will to make the choice to seek Him out or not. The road to clarity, however, is not so clear. There are many bumps filled with hardship challenges and disappointments in life that make us feel that He's not here. This makes us want to quit and give up, and many times we do. But pain doesn't just go away and issues always crop up. Whether it's our relationships, our marriages, raising our children, making money or building our careers, nothing always goes perfectly smooth and right, and that's when we feel like failures. To the ordinary person, the journey can seem very dark and scary. And then what happens? You indulge in all the temptations and pleasures of this world – after all, why not just have fun, instead of living in pain and misery? But, at the end of the day what are you left with? You may run away from reality but reality chases you.

How Do I Relate?

This sounds all foreign to you, and you're probably thinking, "How is this even relevant to my life? Why, my friends and I don't even speak this way?" But this is the issue that the rational mind struggles with: How do we sensitize ourselves to matters of faith when we feel so spiritually dull, constantly pulled down by the mundane and are not even interested in making an effort to push ourselves in His direction? For example, let's take the average person. Try speaking to him about talking to G-d; listen to what he might say: "You know, I really need to stay focused on building my core by attending my Pilates classes five times a week, I've got hours to put in to prepare for the Webinar I'm presenting on new ABA trends for treating autism, I'm in a major rush to get to the organic shop before they close, to get my gluten-

free, artisan breadstick and Starbucks Java Chip coffee, because I haven't eaten all day, and then I must drive the kids to their Taekwondo lessons.... now honestly, where is there room in my day to think about G-d?" So, days, weeks and years pass by and he doesn't give as much as a thought to his relationship with G-d. But G-d thinks about us all the time and He patiently waits. And in those low moments in life, when things don't go the way you want or should, it's His way of tapping on your soul and giving you a nudge in the hope that you will notice the cold shoulder you've been given Him.

Hitting the Lows:

And those moments inevitably come; if not today, then tomorrow, and if not tomorrow then it will hit you somewhere down the road. These words are not meant to lay a guilt trip on you.

Whether you're conscious of it or not, the emptiness inside of you already exists; it's just that you're filling it with all the distractions and glamour that the world around you has to offer. So how many shopping sprees on Amazon, vacations in Cancun, six-figure job promotions, dinner out at all the trendiest restaurants, colossal real-estate developments or hedge fund deals, surfing the net, parties and clubbing will you have tried, done or fantasized about doing, until the ennui finally sets in? Until you finally ask, "What's it all about?" You can't just work out your body to buff and starve your soul. The soul thirsts for the kind of meaning that only a connection with G-d can impart. But how; how do you make the connection to G-d and satisfy the thirsting soul?

The Not-So-Simple Art of Having Simple Faith:

Again the answer is awareness. A shift in your perspective on meaning and purpose in life is in order; the G-d factor must be there. This is done by having a simple faith in G-d. "Is that all?" you wonder. "Is it really that simple?" Yes, absolutely; but cultivating a simple faith in the modern mind is not so simple. You're convinced that you need something more sophisticated; something more in the line of a popular, new age thinking, best-seller off the Barnes and Nobles racks; or perhaps it requires self-surrender through exotic practices like Yoga or Ayurveda to bring you to the mind/body wellness your seeking. No dear friend, nothing so radical like that is necessary; just a simple faith; that's all it takes to achieve the peace of mind you crave. "But, where do I begin" you

rightfully ask. Take a moment and think who created you and everything around you? As the prophet *Yeshayahu* declared long ago, "Lift up your eyes heavenward and realize Who created all of this" (*Yeshayahu, Chap. 40, V.26*). This is what has been missing from your life; a pure and simple faith in G-d.

Get G-d and Get Control:

Up until now you've gone through the motions; sometimes it worked and many times it didn't. You got stuck; you ran into problems, unexpected events occurred, trials, tribulations, life spinning out of control, and age creeping up on you. Where can you run? Where can you hide? Where can you get answers? The answer is G-d. Putting G-d into your life puts control back into it because He controls everything. You see, G-d is reality and all reality is G-d. From the

minutest inanimate object to everything that grows, from every creature that exists to every living person, all are a part of G-d. The totality of creation is actually G-d garbed in an earthly veneer; but you don't see this right away. When you're sitting in the dark, and the light is suddenly switched on, you experience momentary blindness; it takes time until your eyes finally adjust to the change. Same here; up until now, we led our lives thoughtlessly, blind to the reality of G-d's presence and control; that's when events seemed random and our life lacked coherence. But when we put our faith in G-d and His control, a light goes on; suddenly, we are struck by an awareness that we must gradually get used to; and ultimately we will – then it will all start to make sense. Yes, there will still be problems, challenges, disappointments and crises. But now we make connections and realize that it's the

invisible hand of G-d at work. We grow calmer, more patient and accepting. We sense G-d working through us as the verse states, "From my flesh I envision my G-d" (*Job, Chap. 19, V. 26*). You begin to live with G-d, as His presence becomes palpable in your life, and then life will seem so different. You won't be so intimidated by what life throws at you – after all, it all emanates from Him. On the contrary, you will stride through life more confidently and feeling less like a failure.

Needing G-d, not Others:

Go further, strike up a conversation with Him. Talk with Him on a regular basis. The neediness that makes you feel like a failure must stop. You need something, ask Him. Stop relying on others, when you have the best address to go to, as King David declared, "Don't

put your trust in princes, in a [mere] mortal that has no [power] to save” (*Tehillim, Chap. 147, V. 3*). We all do it; we put our trust in this investor, in that specialist, in some friend whose part of the popular crowd. We flatter the rich, we chase the famous and end up disappointed and disillusioned – after all, they can’t even help themselves, how can you expect them to help you? This concept lies at the root of our sense of failure; misplaced trust. We love and seek attention from others who can’t deliver, and become broken, instead of placing our trust in the Almighty. You have to break this habit of relying on others and work on placing your trust only in G-d. Be strong and firm in this and guaranteed you will never need to rely on others. On the contrary, you will inspire others to trust in G-d – which is the biggest favor you can do for them. Remember, you’re only a failure, when

you fail to place your trust in G-d, instead of others. As the Sages said, "Whoever expects [support] from the table of others – the world [seems like] a dark place for him" (*Beitza*, 32*b*). Why? Because if you live in the shadow of others by needing to impress them, then you're never yourself; you are forever held back from being real and authentic, because you are living their truth and not your own (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Cit. 66). It's all one picture; reliance on others is unhealthy dependency that leads to low self-esteem and feelings of failure. But a person who relies solely on G-d and not others, can confidently declare that, **"I'm not a failure."** And not only that, but he instills in others that rock solid faith which is the biggest gift that he can give them.

Make the G-d Connection:

Granted this is all new and probably awkward for you, but go ahead; just try it. Start your G-d-connection today. It doesn't take much and the demand is not great. Simply put your trust in G-d. Keep it simple. If you need something or have a problem, don't automatically reach for the Smartphone. Stop for a moment and just tell it to G-d. Be sincere and train yourself to ask only Him for what you need. This exercise on reliance on G-d will lead to self-reliance and a more confident you. It will take away most of the neediness you feel in life that makes you feel like a failure; and that you can't survive without the help of others. Don't take this advice lightly because it states in the *Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu* (Chap. 15) that, "Whoever [is] lavish in their conversation and prayers [to G-d], – [will witness those very words] escorting him

to his final resting place.” Now that’s an impressive promise. Every conversation that you have with G-d while you’re alive, will serve you well in the Next World. How many of us need to hear this? So many of us walk around lost, confused and scattered in life, why? It’s because they have no one to turn to for help. And when they do reach out to others with no luck, they feel even more like a failure. The equation is simple: The more you rely on others, the more you will feel like a failure.

Faith Training:

To reiterate, overcoming guilt, self-blame and neediness requires a shift in perspective; a conscious internalization of the concept that G-d is exclusively in control of your destiny. And when that happens then your feelings of failure will dissipate. You will proudly and openly

declare **"I'm not a failure"** because you will firmly believe that everything emanates from Him, and not from others. On the contrary, you will be able to laugh it off, as the wisest man of them all, King Solomon, declared "Strength and honor she will wear, and she will laugh on the last day" (*Mishlei, Chap. 31, V. 25*) – meaning, that when a person develops his inner strength, and does not allow himself to fall apart in the face of disappointment, he will laugh last and best. He will require no help from anyone else, because he worked on this his whole life. Remember well what King David said regarding relying on influential people, "[Once] their spirit departs, they return to the ground, and on that day their plans are lost." (*Tehillim, Chap. 146, V. 4*). A person can foolishly think that he will live forever, and indulge his every whim and folly and commits sins of every kind and detach himself from G-d...and then

suddenly, the day arrives that his soul departs and he returns to the ground. If he is lucky enough he will enter the grave and his soul will rest in peace. But, if his soul didn't establish a connection to G-d in this world, then what?

Make G-d a Friend not a Stranger:

But let's not focus on the negative now. Rather, let's examine the benefit and the power of developing a firm conscious awareness of G-d. For what is faith, if not the reality of G-d Himself. And when that reality becomes more and more real to you, then you become more focused on Him than on others. Social comparing and concern for what others have or achieved only breaks you and make you feel more like a failure. Accepting G-d's control over everything, on the other hand, helps you accept yourself; it gives you the power to

recognize your own potential to achieve by being yourself, and not trying to be like others. This is true peace of mind. So many of us however, have misguided perceptions on what it means to serve G-d. Typically, people will adopt extreme rituals and practices, or become fanatically religious, hoping to come closer to G-d. How off the mark! G-d wants nothing more than you should open your eyes and see His spirit energizing all of creation; to hear the inner voice of the Divine quivering in all that shakes and moves; to inhale His spirit in every breath you take. This not a pipe dream or some way-out idea; this is a heightened sense of awareness of G-d's ubiquitous presence that is absent in most of us; that's why He seems more like a stranger to us than a friend. But you can correct that in yourself and in others by inclusion. Make G-d a part of your life. Don't be embarrassed; you need

Him too badly. Talk to Him and about Him to others all the time until He feels real to you, so you won't lose sight of Him in your life. This is what it means to live with G-d in your life. The same with others; pour your heart out to Him and get others to do the same. There is no greater favor you can do for yourself and for them, and what an impact it will have! This may seem awkward and strange at this point, because, you have excluded him from your life as the *Zohar* says, (*Vol. 1, 68a*) "How many of us have hearts that are closed [to G-d] because they don't pay attention to Him and fathom [how] precious The Holy One, blessed-be-He is, as it's written, "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" Don't you want to feel that, "**I'm-not-a-failure**" feeling? Isn't it better to be on the winning side? Then join the winning team and team up with G-d. We're not talking about winning the Superbowl or getting an Oscar. The type

of winning we're talking about is doing what He wants you to do. Look like a Jew, have *Mezuzos* on your doors, put on *Tefillin*, wear *Tzitzis* and keep the Sabbath. This is how a Jew views crossing the finish line and being a true success.

2.

MITZVOS ARE ETERNAL:

Did you ever wonder what happens to you when your life is over? Most of us prefer not to. In Judaism however, the afterlife is a core belief, and what occurs in *this* life, impacts the *next*. Furthermore, reincarnation is also one of the possible consequences for one's actions in this world. But that's not our focus. Rather it's only mentioned here to

underscore how having a faith-based connection to G-d can prevent such an undesirable fate.

Faith in Real Life Terms:

But what does living with faith mean; the concept seems so abstract; what do you have to do? Okay, the alarm rings, you're groggy but you reluctantly climb out of bed to face another day at the office, pressured to close those deals. But first you drag yourself to the synagogue to wind the straps of *Tefillin* around your arm and head, and monotonously mutter the prayers. You're late again. You hurriedly finish the service so you can catch the 6:05 train to work. Stop. Think. What are you doing? Are these merely empty rituals you perform because that's what you have been trained to do-like everybody else in your community? Let's be honest. Who's really getting it these

days? Did you ever take the time to ask, "What's this all about, where is this leading me, what does it mean?" Do you care? Most of us are too anxious, depressed or apathetic to appreciate that when we put on *Tefillin* we are connecting ourselves to G-d. But how can you, when you feel so far from Him? Yet, our spiritually empty society turns to meditation and other exotic practices to fill the void in their lives. Repeat a mantra, utter affirmations visualize yourself relaxing on an island and achieve peace of mind and tranquility; nothing bizarre about that. Yet, we put on *Tefillin* without giving it an iota of thought or feeling. Why don't the *Mitzvos*, G-d's commandments, carry the same appeal? The answer is that the purpose of *Mitzvos* is different. The *Mitzvos* are not just about getting in touch with yourself, instead, they are a nexus towards binding yourself to G-d. The

Tefillin is a daily reminder to take the time to lift the focus off you and shift it to G-d. G-d wants to engage us and *Tefillin* is a vehicle for that. It's a gift from G-d as the Sages wrote, "Israel is [so] beloved, that the Holy One, blessed-be-He, surrounded them with *Tefillin* on their heads and *Tefillin* on their arms" (*Menachos*, 43b).

Getting Closer:

And it doesn't stop there. G-d gives us many opportunities throughout our day and during our lifetime to work on creating that bond. This is what the *Mitzvos* are for, as the Sages said, "Even the boorish amongst you are filled with *Mitzvos* like the [seeds of] a pomegranate" (*Berachos*, 57a). But your head is somewhere else. It's filled all day with obsessive thoughts about your worthlessness. I am nothing, I have

nothing and I'm a failure. That is because your perception of success is all about you – how I look, how cool I dress, how many degrees I have, my career, how much money I make, what car do I drive, what kind of house do I own, my popularity; now where is G-d in the picture? Think a moment; stripped of all these accouterments what are you; what is your purpose; what is your worth after it's all over, and the time comes to meet the Creator that you so neglected to know? As a Jew, we use a different yardstick to measure success. Our net worth is calculated by the amount of *Mitzvos* we have performed, how many opportunities we took advantage of in life to connect to G-d and deepen our relationship with Him. If you're broken and feel defeated, it's because you don't know your true worth. If you knew the hidden potential locked in every *Mitzvah* you would kick up your heels and dance

with joy! Every Jew's day is solidly packed with *Mitzvos* like the seeds in a pomegranate, as the Sages said, "There is not a man in Israel that doesn't perform [at least] one hundred *Mitzvos* a day" (*Yerushalmi Berachos Chap. 9, V. 8*). It may not matter to you now, but it will in time and for all of eternity.

Overcoming Apathy:

But right now you're still stuck in that dull mode. You just don't care. You're not in the mood. The power of the internet and social media makes it hard to pierce through the layers of apathy and cynicism. They carry a different message and flash images of a life you want to have. And because you don't, you feel like you are a failure. Instead of concentrating on G-d, you spend your time scrolling and scrolling on your smartphone checking out inanities. But

deep inside you know that you're not getting anywhere. As you slack off, you slide deeper and deeper into disappointment and despair. So why not give it another try? Just give it a shot. Dust off that pair of *Tefillin* that you stuffed in your drawer and gave up on. Put them on again. Try to muster up some joy and really focus on connecting to G-d. It may trigger some feeling, as Rabbi Nachman said, "A sign of cleaving [to G-d] is *Tefillin*" (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, C't. 28). Even if you don't feel anything, don't give up so fast. Give it time. You and G-d haven't been in touch with each other for quite a while. Now you are approaching this *Mitzvah* with a fresh perspective. It's not about pleasing your parents or being forced to do something you didn't understand back in your youth. It's about putting G-d back into your life; discovering how much He means to you, and how much He wants

you to need Him. Make a conscious effort to stay focused on Him while wearing the *Tefillin*, as the Sages said, "It's forbidden to become distracted from the *Tefillin*" (*Shabbos*, 12a). You know those headbands or wristbands with logos printed on them that teenagers wear? What's behind it? They are promoting a cause and are proudly displaying it. They are making it loud and clear what has meaning for them. Similarly, in ancient times, the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) in the *Beis Hamikdash*, The Holy Temple, wore a golden headband, the *Tzitz*, with the name of G-d inscribed on it, to emphasize what means most to a Jew. Today, *Tefillin* conveys that same message. Before you start your day, binding *Tefillin* on your arm and head grounds you. You won't lose sight so fast of Who's most important in your life, despite all the distractions and pressures that bombard you. Whether you're at the

office, in school, on an airplane, eating in a restaurant with friends, lying in a hospital bed, He is there with you, by your side; to lean on; to help you; to guide you; so that you maintain your composure no matter what situation you're facing at the moment – you don't see Him? He's there. Just stay focused.

Expressions of Love for the Creator:

You see, when you truly love someone they're always on your mind, and sometimes you exchange tokens; a tangible reminder of that bond. Although the concept of the *Tzitz* and *Tefillin* are deeper and more mystical, they still embody expressions of our love towards the Creator. For instance, regarding *Tefillin*, the Sages say, "Whoever wears *Tefillin* [G-d] lengthens his days" (*Menachos*, 44). Wives should not feel shortchanged because they don't perform

this mitzvah. They play an active part in the mitzvah by encouraging their husbands to perform it. If it matters to her then she is equally rewarded as her husband, because they are one.

Mitzvos Are The Real Deal:

But it doesn't stop there. *Tefillin* is not the only mitzvah. There is an abundance of *Mitzvos* that are the tools for a Jew to use to build his relationship with G-d. To be sure, this may sound too religious and awkward for the modern mind. We don't live in a G-d oriented culture. It's an adjustment you have to make, by switching gears and moving to another level. It's a choice you have to make. Do you want to live a banal existence absent of G-d-consciousness, or do you want meaning in your life by having Him in it. Be realistic. Youth fades; we either leave this world young or grow old and feeble;

nobody escapes death; and then what? Granted His anonymous presence makes it hard to feel Him. That's why we have the *Mitzvos*; tangible acts which increase our conscious awareness of Him, so that you get the real feel of Him. When you post a *Mezuzah* on your door and place your hand on it to kiss, you are either bringing Him into your house or taking Him with you wherever you go. Choice of fashion is not only about the image of yourself that you want to project to others. You have to remember you were created in the image of G-d and He should be a part of it; that's what the four fringes of the *Tzitzis* hanging on your waist are for.

Now everybody knows what you put inside yourself impacts your health and well-being. Our society is obsessed with diet and exercise. Today it's the Mediterranean Diet, yesterday it was the

Atkin's diet; she chooses to be vegan, he's carb-free; stores are opening weekly selling exclusively gluten-free products. What about the kosher diet? Here you have a diet that was custom made by G-d, which prevents spiritual arteriosclerosis and keeps the divine spirit flowing, but who listens? So many of us just chuck it out of the window and indulge our appetites with every cuisine and anything off the shelf. You care so much about your body, yet you willingly damage your soul. Then you ask "Where is G-d, how come I can't feel Him?" True, checking package labels for legitimate kosher-supervision symbols is not easy or convenient, but is practicing vegetarianism or cooking macrobiotic any easier? Sure it takes work, but it pays off in the end with the spiritual health that it promotes.

Keep The Sabbath and it Will Keep You:

Does life sometimes feel like a Ferris Wheel, endlessly spinning around from which you can't jump off? Do you find yourself working late at the office, even on weekends with no break? How about taking off one day a week to break the monotonous routine and just rest? That's what *Shabbos* is all about. Here is another example of a *Mitzvah* that affords you the opportunity once a week, to relax, be at peace, home with the family, with time to reflect on meaning and purpose. By keeping the *Sabbath*, it keeps you sound and sane. Yet, so many flout it and complain that it's too restrictive; it hampers their lifestyle. They are missing the point. When we serve G-d by restraining ourselves from all types of work on the *Sabbath*, we paradoxically discover a sense of freedom and not servitude. Life becomes richer. You

identify with your Judaism and its glorious heritage. It imbues us with a sense of pride in who you are. It chases away that sense of failure. There is no other *Mitzvah* that distinguishes a Jew from other cultures than the *Sabbath*, as the Sages said, “The *Sabbath* is equal to all the other *Mitzvos*” (*Yerushalmi Brachos, Chap. 1, V. 5.*).

Take It Slow:

Whether you strayed from observance, or never were observant, this is admittedly a lot to swallow in one gulp. “So many rituals, so much to do, how can I do it all?” Hold on! You’re not expected to change overnight. But there has to be a willingness to be open minded towards your Judaism. With so many options out there and competing ideologies, it’s easy to turn your back on what’s your own and adopt what’s not.

Naturally, what's new and the latest trend has more appeal, especially when it's splashed all over social media. And admittedly, it's not so popular to be part of the unpopular group, but for the most part, what's in now, is gone tomorrow; and then it's that gnawing feeling again of emptiness and disappointment that lies at the heart of your feeling like a failure. There is a dimension of existence that lies beyond this current, fragile one, which is arrived at only after you've left this one; and Judaism addresses how one impacts the other. It cuts through all the dense brush and leads you directly to the light that lies yonder. Its mores and traditions transcend the shallow and bankrupt values of a decadent society that has no serious interest in G-d, or in leading a meaningful life. It's the *Mitzvos* performed down here that help you to cross over there, leading you to a complete awareness of G-d.

Less Focus on the Self and More on G-d:

Self-actualization – Jewish style, places less emphasis on the self and more on actualizing the reality of G-d – and, it's not accomplished by spending your time chasing money, fashion, good looks, cars and real estate. This is probably a totally new way of thinking for you; a complete shift in paradigm. But this is what is happening behind the scenes, and most of the world is either plain ignorant or living in denial. Yet, when tragedy strikes, we wring our hands and scream, "Why?" Well the Sages said, "Anyone who weakens himself [in performance] of even a single mitzvah, will not have the strength to endure the day that trouble [arrives]" (*Berachos*, 63a). Negligence in performing the *Mitzvos* weakens you and contributes to that sense of failure. On the other hand, diligent performance of the *Mitzvos* actually fortifies a person to

overcome anything as the Sages said, “Anyone who performs a *mitzvah* as stated – he will never be informed of bad tidings” (*Shabbos*, 63a). We are so out of touch that we cannot fathom the impact *Mitzvos* have on our lives and future destiny, as the Sages warned, “Be as cautious with the lenient *Mitzvos* as with the more stringent ones, because a person doesn’t know [how] the reward is [calculated] for each *Mitzvah*” (*Avos*, Chap. 4, V. 2). You may ask, “What does G-d want?” Simple, He wants you to do what He wants – His will, which are the *Mitzvos*, and this should be Man’s greatest joy!

3.**WHEN YOU'RE HAPPY YOU WISH LIFE
COULD LAST FOREVER:**

“Enough with the lectures and all this talk about G-d. I’ve been there, done that and heard it over and over.” You’re too upset and angry to hear all this religious stuff. Your life is in shambles and you’ve hit rock bottom. You’re ashamed of yourself; at the mess you made of your life. You can’t face your wife, your kids, your friends and co-workers – nobody. It’s been too long and it’s too late; “I can’t fix this”. You’re too worn out and weary to even try anymore – anyway, you think, what’s the use? As you toss and turn in bed, unable to fall asleep, you anxiously obsess about your failures; all the bad decisions you made. “How did my marriage become so dry and stale? What did I do wrong that my kids are

floundering and are so dysfunctional? Why am I stuck in a dead-end job, when I could have made more of myself? How did I lose my house and now I can't even put a roof over my head? Where are the nice cars, clothing and vacations that others have, and I don't? I've read every self-help book out there, sat in therapy and yes, even prayed to G-d here and there, yet nothing works. I've stood still for so long I can't take it anymore! Worst part is that there's no one out there to talk to; no one to safely share my pain and shame with." So, you avoid others, keeping company with the bleak thoughts swimming inside your head. You become increasingly paranoid, thinking what a dark and unfriendly place this world is! Yet, you were always a nice person so, "Why did this happen to me? Why has G-d forsaken me?" you ask. Your situation has become so intolerable that your repressed rage can't help but

begin to surface and seep out, making you furious at the universe that never seems to be on your side. Stuck playing the blame game you pull the victim card with every move you make.

Change How You Think:

Dear friend, you are only a failure because you believe that you are a failure, and that has to change. Granted you had a tough life. Perhaps you even suffered trauma or abuse, but the mind is a powerful tool that can either imprison you or set you free. Somewhere in your childhood or past you received messages that you are a nothing and unworthy of G-d's love. Convinced that these negative thoughts were true, you sabotaged your own chances at success and repeatedly failed. You allowed each failure to chip away at your self-esteem, using it as proof that you are a bad

person deserving of all that was happening to you. Sinking further and further into sadness and depression you became so dysfunctional that you lost all hope and gave up. The toxic emotions of guilt, shame and blame eventually became the prison bars that locked you in an antagonistic relationship with G-d – “after all, didn’t He forsake me?” You think so, but there is nothing further from the truth.

Opening Up Yourself to G-d’s Love:

The time has come to stop beating yourself up with false notions of a cruel and punishing G-d, and instead open yourself up to His abundant and unconditional love. You have no choice. You have been hurting for too long, starving for His love. Yes, I can understand your resistance. You’re stalling because you’re still nursing

visions from your youth of a stuffy, outdated image of a stern and demanding deity. With all the pain you've gone through, you struggle with the concept of a G-d that actually cares for you in a personal way, and loves you for who you are. But He does; He really does.

Here's How:

Why not try this: Just close your eyes for a moment and clear your mind of all your pain and misery. Now, focus on G-d, just really focus on Him. Open your mouth and reach out to Him. Tell Him, "G-d I'm in so much pain, where are You? I need you like never before. Please help me. I need your love. I need to feel you, to be with me, to help me – I don't have anyone except you. I'm so lost and alone". Remember, He created you and placed you in this world with all its predicaments. Only He can help you and

give you the roadmap you need to get through life.

Quit Being Skeptical:

Yes, we live in a cynical generation when it comes to the topic of faith. We believe G-d exists, but we don't think that He's available to help us with the practical solutions of life's day to day problems. So, instead you're more willing to visit the psychiatrist and try this drug and that medication to lift your mood and relieve your psychological pain. And, like everybody else, you talk incessantly about how to make money. Maybe if you earn that degree or land that job, or make that deal or win the Mega-million lottery you can finally escape your poverty. Now I ask: How long do you want to go around on the merry-go-round leading to nowhere? Isn't time to hop off

and do something that will bring real and lasting change in your life?

You've Got G-d All Wrong:

But this generation is so stuck in depression that we don't know what G-d even feels like. We can't sense His warmth, His presence and His abundant love for us. He is right here, by us, next to us yet, we're blind and clueless. We stubbornly cling to outdated beliefs that to have a connection to G-d you have to live a life of abstinence, absent of any joy or pleasure. Nothing can be further than the truth. If there is no joy, then you're not living with G-d in your life, as Rabbi Nachman stated, "It's a great commandment to always be joyful" (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 2, Cit. 24). The problem today is that you are trying to achieve happiness and joy in life, in spite of faith, instead of finding it in your faith.

You can't circumvent G-d and expect to find true joy and meaning in life. Your sense of failure is not because you didn't make it in life, rather it's your failure to make Him a part of your life. You can continue living a life of misery without Him or a life of harmony with Him. The choice is yours.

Footstep Out of the Fold:

And many have made that choice. They decided to take footsteps out of the fold, veering off the path of Jewish observance. Why? Perhaps they were raised with a form of Judaism that was missing warmth, joy and love. Joy gives us a feeling of being alive; it has the power to motivate us to do, to grow, to develop our personalities. Judaism practiced without joy is stifling and oppressive. Society today is searching for formats in which to actualize our creative

energies and talent. The emphasis is on individuality and self-expression. If they don't find it within, they will look for it without. No one wants to stay in a system that they feel failed them and in which makes them feel like a failure, so they leave. And where do they go? Into the waiting arms of the secular society, embracing alien cultures and exploring foreign ideas. Initially it's fun and exciting, but the truth always surfaces to the top. Nobody likes to wear other people's clothes, when they have their own.

Think About What You're Doing:

Look deeper into what you have. If you can get past the glamour and glitz of the outer world, then perhaps, you can see the Jewish one from a different perspective. Admittedly the system has many problems and faults, but what

about G-d? Where does He fit into the new you? Have you rethought your relationship with Him? Did you ever have one? Today's society is open and free. You can redefine yourself into whatever lifestyle suits you. You can have fun, lead a relaxed life; more lighthearted and chilled. You can eat what you want, indulge in all the pleasures life has to offer. You can pursue higher education, get a degree, build a successful career, have security and lots of money – and of course, follow sports and politics. It's all very attractive and appealing. So you got a degree in finance, you discovered Mozart, you enjoy novels and movies. You shed the dowdy, frumpy, black and whites of yesteryear and replaced them, with up-to-date fashions bursting with colors that make a statement; jeans, Armani suits, Chanel. You were so closed off, but now you are free to dress as you please. The *Yarmulke* is gone, along with

the *Tzitzis*. Kosher food is no longer important – anyway hasn't Judaism failed you. All along you were fooled. The outside world has so much to offer; or so you think!

So You're Ready to Pick Up and Leave:

Can one really escape their background? When you attend a wedding, doesn't the joy and exuberance pull at you? When you return for any event does something stir in you? What was missing that made you leave the fold? Could it be that you were angry and frustrated that your needs were not met, that no one understood you and what you were going through; that there was no one to talk to; that you just didn't fit into the box and conform? Where was all the love and joy that's supposed to be happening when you connect to G-d? Why was it so blatantly absent, and

instead, there existed in its place a cold, didactic system that was cheerless and oppressive; filled with “thou shall nots”; that individuality and the creative spirit were crushed and life felt like utter sameness. So you cut out and left.

Is Leaving Really the Answer?

But, where did you go? To the land of opportunity, to a culture that prizes intellectualism, celebrates individuality and promotes choice? What a relief; it feels so different! It's okay for now, but, where are you heading? What is your identity? Do you feel comfortable if your children or grandchildren will not be Jewish? Do you think that this is the first time in history that the outside world looked so appealing and promising that we flocked there? But where did it get us? Two thousand years of surviving one oppressive civilization after another and

we're ready to turn our backs on G-d and make centuries of struggle meaningless?

Anger Doesn't Work:

Again dear friend, what was and still is missing? Why are pockets of our people becoming overtly or covertly communities of rebels? The answer is that many of us are angry and hurt inside. In our communities or families of origin, we didn't find love, acceptance and joy. We had hoped that our service of G-d, as we were taught, would make us not break us; and that our fellow Jews would help us, not hurt us. But it wasn't so. So you became upset and angry and tossed religion and faith out the door. You broke out of the shackles that bound you and now you are free; but is that so? In the beginning you felt exhilarated and hopeful – you danced and rejoiced, you drank and indulged, and best of all you

discovered so many others like you to give you love and support – so where is that sense of unease coming from now? Why the lingering pangs of guilt and shame; and it doesn't let up; you're never satisfied. Why? Because anger doesn't work; it just ultimately turns into depression, and depression leads to feelings of failure.

Turn Anger into Love by Connecting to G-d:

So, dear friend, I ask, “Can you learn to forgive, can you trade anger for love?” Yes, these words are hard to accept especially in the open society we live in. In the age of social media we have lost the capacity to feel. The incessant distraction from images bombarding us from the internet and the explosion of information gives us no peace; it's just too much all at once. You're so hooked up to the outside with all the latest

technological devices, that you don't have a chance to think or feel about what's going on inside. But to heal you must; you have make time to unhook yourself from technology and start connecting to G-d.

Counter Anger and Depression with Joy:

“But how; be specific?” Logically speaking, to get out, you have to examine how you got in and then go in reverse. So, if you arrived by means of anger depression, then you must return by pushing joy and hope; and, it's not the joy and good-mood high that's derived from partying and pleasure seeking, rather it's an inner contentment that comes when you are comfortable with yourself and who you are. Feelings of failure arise through overuse of pleasure to temporarily relieve pain and mask problems. Inner joy is the result of

overcoming fear and facing your problems. “Yeah, but you don’t know how bad my problems really are! After years of misery, you say I just have to be happy and it will all disappear?” No, but you have to start somewhere. Let’s get real. The messages inside your head are negative. Your speech is full of put-downs. You rarely smile and you’re always upset, now, how do you expect to get well and get out? Quit whining and complaining. Turn negative messages into positive ones; no gloom and doom. Don’t put yourself down to yourself nor to others, rather build yourself up and have some self-pride. Paste a smile on your face and beam with joy so others are attracted to you, instead of fleeing from you. Don’t think about it so much; just do it! Change your attitude and your life will change. Joy attracts joy, so little by little the sadness will dissolve. Others will find it a pleasure to be around you, and

you will be happier having company to be with. This is the meaning of true success; but it's up to you. No one can do the work for you.

Success is Yours When You Don't Give Up:

As a Jew, this is no secret to you. You don't need self-help books to teach you the secret behind the miraculous survival and success of a people that has been beaten and pursued throughout the ages. When the chips are down and all looks dark and lost, you don't give up and give in. You defy the odds and you stick to G-d and don't abandon Him. And guess what? He won't leave you either. It may seem that way, but He never does. And that's why the Jewish people have survived and are successful. If you're a Jew, you're not a failure. You only failed to appreciate your worth. If you are a Jew, it's only because over the centuries

your ancestors clung to G-d and their beliefs, despite it all, and didn't decide to become something else.

Don't Wait, Act Now:

But this can only be accomplished when you are truly content and comfortable with who you are and what you have. How precious is joy and its power to heal the broken and tormented heart. You're down and out, feeling hopeless and in despair; then change. Not tomorrow – there are no tomorrows – only today. Take one positive step today, because joy waits for no one (*Tanchuma, Shemini, 2*). Yes, I know that you're not at peace with G-d; that's because you're not at peace with yourself and you have not made peace with your past. But today can be different. You can change, and your life can change. You can reconnect to G-d, but this time with joy and love.

Your failure in life is not you; it's only your failure to know how good it is and will be, if you only open yourself up to it.

4.

DON'T BE SOLD ON WHAT OTHERS PROMISE:

“The-Grass-is-Always-Greener” Syndrome:

Do you feel stuck in the “grass-is-greener” syndrome? Are you pinning your hopes on the latest NY Times best-seller to rescue you from all your problems? Do you find yourself endlessly surfing blogs in search of elusive answers to life's predicaments? Or, perhaps out of desperation, you've bought into the promise of a quickie, life-altering experience by signing up to a large group seminar like Landmark or Tony Robbins?

Dear friend, perhaps your grass is not green because you have put your all into what *others* have, instead of what *you* have! In the age of disposable everything, it seems so easy to trade in your well-worn coat for a more up-to-date, flashier one. Never mind that it's a made-in China, inferior quality and a cheap imitation. You want it, and why? Because someone posted-it on Instagram?

The Invasion of the Net:

You see, never has a society been invaded by the likes of the intrusive phenomenon called social media; why with one click, you gain insta-access into other people's intimate space triggering a cycle of endless social comparing. Those of us who are already struggling with self-doubts about our personal identities become even shakier by the exposure to dizzying array of options and alternative

lifestyle showcased on the screen. Yes, it all looks appealing and attractive, but how much of it is real and how much of it is not? But you don't care that it may be fake. You're tired of the old, and this is so exciting that it has to be better than what you have. But ask yourself, after all the endless hours of thrill seeking on the net, do you feel any better? Is the emptiness within you now filled with more meaning? Did you achieve the sense of inner peace and satisfaction you were hoping for? Isn't it ironic that it seems to offer so much but in reality, it leaves you with so little. Why? Perhaps, because with all the reality it alleges to show, in reality it takes you further away from your own, inner truth. Instead of finding the real you, you lose yourself even more and end up worse than when you started.

The Truth is Within, not Without:

You see, real truth lies within us; not without. And paradoxically speaking, by running away from your Judaism you were in reality running away from yourself. Your struggle with faith – the guilt, the pain and anger at G-d – are all a reflection of your struggle to come to grips with accepting yourself. But, if you can turn the beat around and find it in your heart to forgive yourself – and even to love yourself – you will come to love G-d once more. Make peace with yourself and you will be at peace with your Jewish soul. So, give up the futile search of finding who you are in other people's gardens. It may look pretty, smell nice and feel good, but it's not you. Believe in yourself, by believing in G-d and you will discover the real beauty of who you are.

5.**YOU'LL KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT A FAILURE
WHEN YOU STOP BATTLING OTHERS AND
BEATING UP YOURSELF:**

“I may not be a failure, but I sure feel like one!” How many times does this refrain echo in your mind? Throughout the days, weeks and years you cannot help but compare yourself to where you are and where you should have been. A dead marriage, kids that are drifting, stuck in the same old job, lonely, bored and going nowhere; same old, same old. Wasted talent, lost opportunities, few achievements. “How did the parade pass me by?” Of course you’re angry and indignant. “How did everyone else get ahead and leave me behind?” Angry and resentful, you cold shoulder others and shut out the world. Is this your sad picture? Can you relate?

Failure is a Mindset:

Dear friend, would you rather go down fighting or lying down? Listen carefully: You are only a failure, if you believe you're a failure. Yes, it's all in the mind; that's where it began and that's where it has to stop! You see, somewhere, way back in your past you were repeatedly told, "Why aren't you like so-and-so?" The message may have been subtle, but you took it to heart and it stuck. Now with an "I'm-not-good-enough" attitude how did you ever expect to succeed? As you craned your neck to see what house he purchased, what job she landed, what grade he got, how popular she is, the feelings of inferiority became even more reinforced. Lower and lower your self-esteem plummeted as you once again, branded yourself a failure. Resenting what others had and you didn't, naturally triggered a barrage of

the regrets: If only I had lost weight, I should have found a better job, if only I had gotten my graduate degree, If only I had agreed to marry etc... Stop beating yourself up. You've got it all wrong. Self-worth is not measured by how much you live up to the standards of the outside world, rather it's how much you accept the person you are inside; that is sacred and precious. When we live to impress others, we have truly failed ourselves.

Peace with Yourself/Peace with Others:

True success is when you are at peace with yourself and with others; the two go hand in hand. This principle spans across all strata and cultures, whether it's personal or society at large. In order for there to be true and lasting peace, we must eradicate all forms of discrimination and racism from our families, schools, offices, communities

and nations. When one group is made to feel inferior to the next, that's when wars break out and world peace shatters. Every person, family, school, community and nation must learn to value themselves and respect each other, and then peace will reign. Each person must do their part.

Start in Your Own Home:

But where do you start? How about at the grassroots level; your own home, as the Sages taught, "Whoever instills peace in his home, Scripture considers it as tantamount to having instilled peace in [the Nation of] Israel (*Avos D'Rebbi Nosson, Chap. 28, V. 3*). Because each person's home is a microcosm of society at large, it operates on the same principle. If we were to trace the source of a person's core sense of failure, we would probably have to go no further than their

home life. If a basic spirit of mutual respect prevailed in the home - especially between the parents - then the likelihood of well-adjusted children emerging from there would be high. For instance, when children witness a mother's restraint to criticize her husband when he arrives home tired and worn-out from work, then they develop in turn, patience and self-control. Furthermore, when they observe their father reciprocate with love and appreciation, they apply those same approaches to their own relationships, likewise creating, successful marriages and families. Once you master these principles in your own home, it will be easy for you to utilize them in all your relationships in life, such as with neighbors, bosses and your friends. You will become a genuine success!

Failure on the National Level:

Work on it. You can't afford to fail, because the price is too high. Look at the polarization that's ripping apart national parties today. Why? Because the inexorable need for power and control overrides the greater goal of peace and harmony. Leaders of nations are compensating for an inferiority complex on the national level, by intimidating weaker countries; threatening them, instead of joining with them in a spirit of cooperation. Lacking a sense of inner peace and security, how can they make peace with others? But you can, by opting out of the madness seizing our generation today.

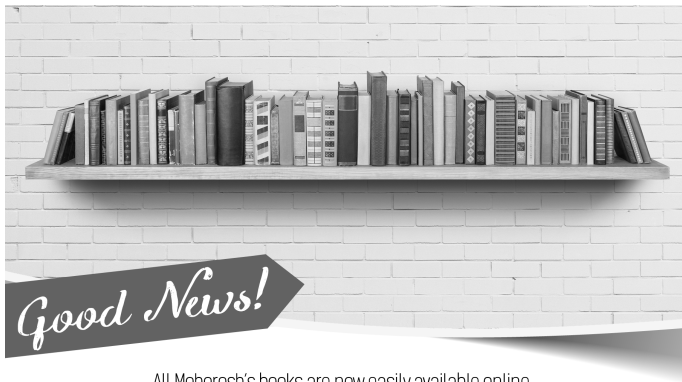
Stop Chasing Illusions:

Begin at the grassroots level by remembering that there is a G-d in the

heaven above, Whose name is synonymous with peace (Shabbos, 10a). Think about it: with life being but a brief sojourn, how sensible is it to furiously chase a phantom image of success, as portrayed by social media? As we all know, even when you think you got it, you didn't because there's nothing there. It's all an illusion; it doesn't last. But how did you get there? What made you think you were a failure? Perhaps it's was that gnawing sense of emptiness one feels when G-d is absent from their life. You thought that you can numb the pain and fill the void by amassing luxury cars, homes, vacations, I-devices and making social media connections; but, you didn't. Because when we disconnect ourselves from G-d, we become disconnected from ourselves as well; then our illusory success rings hollow. The only connection that can bring meaning to our lives is our connection to G-d.

Conclusion:

Success is all about what you have inside, not outside. It's about feeling content and good enough about yourself, without amassing things, objects or the desperate need for approval from others. Only by realizing that all reality is G-d and G-d is the only reality, and that all you need is Him, then you can free yourself from the tyranny of needing others. This is the meaning of true success. You will no longer feel afraid and insecure, because you have a firm faith in Him. He is all you need so you're ok with yourself, because you're ok with Him. Now, no one can work you over in life and make you feel like a failure. You're done needing others, because you have G-d and that is all you need.



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