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**The Most Important Book that You Might Ever Read**

**By Daniel Keren**

(*Body & Soul: The Torah Path to Health, Fitness and a Holy Life by Rabbi Alexander Seinfeld & Dr. Daniel Grove MD with afterward by Rabbi Benzion Shafier, 2023, 475 pages, distributed by Feldheim Publishers*.)

 

**Rabbi Alexander Seinfeld and Dr. Daniel Grove MD**

 “Body & Soul” by Rabbi Alexander Seinfeld and Dr. Daniel Grove offers as its subtitle says – the Torah path to health, fitness and a holy life.” Anything that you want in life or that you would like to achieve is ultimately dependent on your being able to maintain a healthy body.

As a mother you want to raise a wonderful family loyal to Hashem and His Torah. Or as husband and father you want to become a Talmud chacham (Torah scholar) in order to inspire your children or to help Klal Yisroel and the world at large. Or perhaps you want to establish a business like a supermarket or online operation to provide affordable products that people in your community require. Or perhaps you want to organize a mosdos (charitable organization) to make life better for Jews around the world.

**Absolutely Essential that You be Healthy**

 If you are to be truly successful in any of the above worthy endeavors, it is absolutely essential that you be healthy and not have to waste precious time with time consuming and expensive medical appointments and procedures. And that is where “Body & Soul” can if you read it with the proper understanding make all of your above goals and other dreams become a reality.

 The authors are careful to offer a disclaimer – “This book is intended for educational purposes only and is not for psak halachah or medical advice. For personal medical guidance please consult your physician, dietician or other health care professional.”

 Rabbi Seinfeld has gone out of his way to find quotes from famous rabbis both contemporary and going back to the Rambam in addition to sources in the Talmud. He has seclected prominent rabbis from every type of Jewish community, including Chassidic rebbes, Litvishe roshei yeshivas, modern Orthodox, Sephardic, etc.

**G-d Has Given Us a Precious Gift – Our Health**

 The book is written in an easy-to-understand language that respects the difficulties most of us face in trying to stay healthy while living lifestyles that may be stressing and challenging. One of the main points of “Body & Soul” is that G-d has given us all a precious gift – our health – and us custodians of His gift, it is our responsibility to try and utilize our body to our best abilities by keeping it healthy.

 Besides many chapters devoted to eating properly, there are other very important chapters on the importance of exercise, sleep, bodily functions (i.e. going to the bathroom,) pursuing serenity, protecting your hearing and most importantly helping children to develop healthy habits.

 There is no doubt in anybody’s mind that smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol in an excessive matter is very harmful to the body. However the very common problem of overeating affects not just Jews, but almost every ethnic community in the world, including surprisingly the people in nations like Mainland China and India which once suffered from problems relating to not having enough food to eat.

 The Jewish community has always placed a strong emphasis on enjoying food, especially on Shabbos and holidays. Rabbi Fischel Schacter once quoted a famous rabbi whose name I forgot who said that the problem in America is that we treat every day like it was Shabbos or Yom Tov with regards to special foods and deserts that we consume. Everytime one goes to a simcha or for a yeshiva or other notable Torah institution’s annual dinner, the smorgasboard can be a really dangerous temptation.

 The war can be won if one focuses on the specific battle before one. You don’t lose 30 or 40 lbs in just one month or even two or three months. Perhaps, one might just skip the smoargasboard and come in time for the dinner. Instead of going to the wedding, come to the chupah and give your check gift to the father of the chason or kallah and return for the dancing if you are not tired.

 There are many great ideas in “Body & Soul: The Torah Path to Health. Fitness and a Holy Life. For up-to-date Body & Soul information, video, classes, events and activies, the reader is invited to click TorahHealth.org The new book itself is available in bookstores or on online websites. With the coming of the Tishrei holidays with its strong emphasis on delicious (i.e. fattening) foods, I strongly recommend giving copies of “Body & Soul” to anyone you truly care about.

*Reprinted from the August 25, 2023 edition of The Jewish Connection.*

**Thoughts that Count**

**for Our Parsha**

*And the L-rd your G-d will circumcise your heart* (Deut. 30:6)

Elsewhere in the Torah it states (Deut. 10:16), "And you shall circumcise the foreskin of your heart," i.e., that the individual Jew must perform the "circumcision" himself. How do we reconcile these two verses? The first stage of the "circumcision," i.e., removing the "obstruction" that separates the Jew from G-d, must be initiated by the individual. The second stage, however, of completely transforming the heart to good, can only be accomplished with G-d's help. *(Ohel Torah, quoting the Kotzker Rebbe)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim*

**The Unique Covenant of the Jewish People Standing Together Before G-d**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



This week we read two Torah portions, Nitzavim and Vayeilech. The portion of Nitzavim begins, "You are all standing together this day before G-d... the leaders of your tribes, your elders, your officers, all the men of Israel, your children and your wives, to pass into G-d's covenant."

What is the intent of a covenant? When two people feel a powerful attraction to each other but realize that with the passage of time the attraction could wane, they establish a covenant. The covenant maintains their connection even at times when on a conscious level there might be reasons for distance and separation.

This portion of the Torah is read every year on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashana, because on Rosh Hashana, the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people is renewed. For on Rosh Hashana, we "are all standing... before G-d." The essential G-dly core which every person possesses rises to the forefront of his consciousness, and the fundamental bond between G-d and humankind surfaces. On this basis a covenant is renewed for the entire year to come, including the inevitable occasions when these feelings of oneness will not be experienced as powerfully.

The Torah states that this covenant is being established when "you are all standing together," and proceeds to mention ten different groupings within the Jewish people. Implied is that the establishment of a bond of oneness with G-d is also mirrored by bonds of oneness within our people. For the same spiritual potential that motivates our connection to G-d evokes an internal unity which bonds our entire people together.

The essence of every one of us is a soul which is a Divine spark, an actual part of G-d is within us; that is why we are bound to Him.

We all share this infinite and unbounded spiritual potential equally. That is why we are bound to each other. And that is why the covenant is established as we stand together. For as we center on the inner motivation for our relationship with G-d, we realize that a spiritual reality is all-encompassing and joins us with each other.

In our prayers we say, "Bless us our Father, all as one." Standing together as one generates a climate fit for blessing. Standing before G-d "as one," on Rosh Hashana will lead to a year of blesssing for all humankind in material and spiritual matters.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim. Excerpted from Keeping in Touch, published by Sichos in English, adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*

**More Thoughts that**

**Count for Our Parsha**

*Teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths* (Deut. 31:19)

Do not think that you have completely fulfilled your obligation by writing a Torah scroll (or having one written) at the same time your children are being educated in a non-Jewish environment. The main purpose of writing a sefer Torah is to actually teach it to your children - "put it in their mouths." *(Avnei Ezel)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on How or Why**

**To Prohibit a 12-Year-Old Girl**

**from Going to the Public Library**

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**QUESTION:** Should a twelve-year-old girl be forbidden from going to the library? And are there alternatives?

**ANSWER:** As far as the first question, today the library is off limits for anybody. Everybody knows that they have stocked toeivah books and there are other books too like that; and they’re in the children’s section. So, letting a child go by herself to a library and looking through the books means that the parent is either entirely ignorant or doesn’t care.

Libraries used to be good places. When I was a boy, we could go with confidence to the library. There were shelves of books where you could read about poor boys who worked hard. Horatio Alger books; shelves filled with books about people who worked hard and were honest and they became successful. Inspiring books.

Today, all you read is books of criminals and wicked children. You read about a child who murdered his father or who brings a gun to school to shoot his teacher. And besides violence, today the books are filled with immoralities. Terrible things. Libraries are off limits today. They are foul places and I think that even adults shouldn’t go to the library.

What’s the alternative? If you must read English books, you can buy old-time books, old-time sets of Mark Twain. Now it’s not that I’m recommending it. Mesillas Yesharim is better than that. But if you must read English books then read the old-time sets of O. Henry. Old-time sets of Dickens. If you like heavier stuff, old-time sets of Sir Walter Scott, Ivanhoe and other such books. There are plenty of books that won’t poison the mind as virulently as today’s books. There are plenty of books. There are alternatives.

And I want to tell you that it’s a big error of the principals of the English Departments of the Yeshivos and Bais Yaakov schools, when they give children assignments to go to the library. It’s irresponsible. Maybe twenty years ago, but not today. So, the principals, the men and women principals of the English Departments of the Yeshivos and the Bais Yaakovs, should no longer send their pupils to the libraries.

*Excerpted from a Parshas Ki Savo 5783 email of Toras Avigdor based on Rabbi Avigdor Miller’s Tape #561 (August 1985) from his classic Thursday night lectures.*

**Final Thoughts that**

**Count for Our Parsha**

*But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it* (Deut. 30:14)

This teaches that it is in every Jew's power to bring the Torah closer to him. It is only dependent on our will, that we observe it with our "mouth" and "heart." *(Sefat Emet)*

*Gather the people together, men, and women, and children...that they may hear and learn and fear the L-rd your G-d, and take care to do all the words of this Torah* (Deut. 31:12)

According to the Minchat Chinuch, the mitzva of Hakhel (the commandment for all Jews to assemble in Jerusalem on Sukkot following the Sabbatical year, to hear the king recite the Book of Deuteronomy) is incumbent on every Jew from birth. From this we learn that a child's Jewish education must likewise commence from birth. *(Likutei Sichot)*

*Reprinted from the Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5760/2000 edition of L’Chaim*

**Who Created G-d, Mommy?**



***A six-year-old asked his mother the following question: If G-d created the universe, who created G-d? She turned to me for an answer.***

A mother wrote to me last week with an interesting question:

My six-year-old son asked me the following: If G-d created the universe, who created G-d? What is the appropriate answer to a young mind?

I was doubly impressed – by the six-year-old who asked such a great a question, and by the mom who took his question seriously enough to ask how to answer him.

The first thing I wrote to the mom was how great that her son is asking such big questions. I suggested that even more valuable than the specific answer, she could use this as an opportunity to inculcate in her son the importance of questioning and being curious about the world and ideas. This is the bedrock of learning; indeed, the foundation of becoming his own individuated person, able to think for himself and carve out his own path in life.

This shouldn’t be taken for granted. I’ve met many young Jews who were turned off by Judaism when they were kids because their Hebrew school teacher or day school rabbi disregarded their question, or worse told them, “You can’t ask that question here.” That non-reply inadvertently conveys the message that you shouldn’t think and that Judaism doesn’t have the answers to your questions.

**Abraham’s Search for God**

Then I suggested an answer the mom could share with her son:

Bottom of Form

When Abraham, the first forefather of the Jewish People, was a small boy, he asked his father a similar question. His father Terach owned an idol store with all sorts of cool gods on the shelves. One day his father got a new moon god and Abraham asked his father, “Hey, where did this one come from?” His father told him that he got it from the local idol factory. After all, somebody must have made that moon god.

**Then Abraham asked *your* question, “Who created God?”**

Abraham thought about that and then asked, “Who made the idol factory?” His curious mind kept going back in time, asking, “Who created that? And who created that?” Because everything that exists has something that came before it which created it, like you have parents, and your parents had parents, stretching all the way back in time.

At one point Abraham reached the beginning of it all, the first point of time, and he asked, “Who created Time? Who created the whole universe?”

As he got older, Abraham began to understand that the Being Who created Time must be Infinite, existing beyond Time, since Time wasn’t yet created. That Being is G-d.

Then Abraham asked *your* question, “Who created G-d?”

Now this gets really interesting. If something created G-d, is He G-d? If G-d was created, then He is just like us. He isn’t infinite; He has a beginning which means He exists in time. And since He exists in time He can also end, like all things eventually end. That isn’t G-d. G-d is Eternal. Eternal means He always existed; He has no beginning.

So, nothing made Him or gave Him life. He is Life, and all life stems from His never-ending lifeforce. And that’s why G-d can never die, since He exists above Time. So, G-d’s existence is totally different that our existence.

I concluded by telling the mom that she’ll be surprised how much young minds can understand and to please let me know how her discussion goes.

**How Did It Go?**

A few days later she wrote me back:

Dear Rabbi Coopersmith,

I shared your answer with my son. We had a sincere conversation. He was very interested in the origin of the universe and the meaning of "Time" and "Eternal" being. But he was mostly interested in your final explanation that G-d is the source of Life. He concluded that everything in the universe is Life and is G-d and that is the meaning of life.

Thank you so much for giving me some tools to deal with such a big question and for nurturing a young mind.

The most sophisticated minds have difficulty describing the Infinite G-d and His interplay with creation. This precocious six-year-old did a pretty darn good, albeit imperfect, job. (A point to consider: Everything is a *reflection* of G-d; not everything *is* G-d – which is pantheism.) Indeed, G-d and Life are one. Nothing gives Him life; He is Life itself, eternal, unending and absolute, the transcendent Source of all existence.

I look forward to the next question he comes up with!

*Reprinted from this week’s website of aish.com*

**How to Get in Touch**

**With Your Soul**

**By**[**Eli Landes**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/20579/jewish/Landes-Eli.htm)

Here’s an interesting fact: we are each born with *two* souls.1 One’s self-obsessed, driven by urges, hungry for self-aggrandization. The other (the one we mean when we talk about “the soul”) is G‑dly—“Literally,” to quote Tanya,2 “a part of G‑d.”

That first soul, the animal soul, is the one we innately feel. We feed it when we eat, when we sleep, when we work, when we exercise. It’s expressed in our emotions, our personality, our urges. It’s the soul that we, as physical beings with physical needs, intimately understand and connect with.

But what about the G‑dly soul? What does *it*want? If we were to quiet the noise of our inner animal, what would we hear our spark of [G‑d](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/433240/jewish/God.htm) saying?

How do we connect with something that’s literally a part of G‑d?

By choosing spirituality over physicality, conventional wisdom argues. Instead of chasing after physical urges and desires, chase spiritual ones. Pray. Study. Maybe fast a little. Forget the world—fall in love with *G‑d*.

After all, that’s what the soul was doing before it came down here.3 Before the soul got placed into your body it was in Heaven, studying Torah and basking in G‑d’s light. It enjoyed a purely spiritual existence. So it stands to reason that that’s what it wants to do now.

But there’s a problem with that argument: if it’s all about spirituality, why did G‑d place the soul in a body in the first place? No matter how spiritual your life, it is nothing at all compared to the spirituality the soul enjoyed when it was uninhibited by the body.

And while yes, the G‑dly soul appreciates prayer, study, and emotionally and intellectuality connecting with G‑d, the animal soul can appreciate spiritual pursuits as well.4 There’s intellectual pleasure in study; satisfaction and meaning in connecting to a cause. The animal soul can appreciate that, too.



*Art by*[*Sefira Lightstone*](https://www.chabad.org/3159160)

Forsaking the world is not the tune to the G‑dly soul’s song.

No, what the G‑dly soul seeks is to give itself completely to G‑d—to divest itself of any sense of self or individuality and become caught up in the infinite oneness of its Creator.5 The animal soul is an animal not because it’s dumb, or wild, or a brute, but because it’s self-obsessed. Ultimately, everything the animal soul chases—physical or otherwise—is because of what it gets out of it. The G‑dly soul finds that trite.

The G‑dly soul wants—deeply, deeply wants—to do what G‑d wants.

It’s why it came down here in the first place. Not because of what it gets out of it, but because G‑d said, “I have a plan,” and our soul said, “I’m in.” It’s why the soul is intensely spiritual and yet willing to clothe itself in the corporeal.6 Not because it doesn’t know what it wants, but because it’s not *about*what it wants. The soul cares about what *G‑d* wants.

G‑d wants this world to become a spiritual place, [where His presence is felt](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/52551/jewish/What-is-the-Purpose-of-Existence.htm). And that can only happen through souls, enclothed in our bodies, engaging with this world in accordance with His will.

**Lots of Ways to Live a Spiritual Life**

It’s why the only way to express our soul is through [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1426382/jewish/Torah.htm) and mitzvot. There are lots of ways to live a spiritual life. And lots of ways to live a physical life. Our animal soul can find enjoyment in any one of them, but to express the G‑dly soul—that inner spark of G‑d, that inner voice of selflessness—there’s only one path: Connect to G‑d through Torah and [mitzvot](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm).

Because more than anything, G‑d wants a connection with *you*. And Torah and mitzvot are how we build that connection.

(And when we *don’t*engage in Torah and mitzvot—when we deprive our soul of its purpose—our soul feels deep anguish. To the soul, being enclothed in a body is akin to captivity. It weathers the captivity because it knows there’s a purpose to it, but when we don’t let that purpose be fulfilled, our soul literally cries out for mercy from the pain.7)

Essentially, it’s not about spirituality or physicality as much as it’s about the intent. Remember how we said earlier that we feed the animal soul when we eat, when we sleep, when we work, when we exercise? That’s true, but only if we engage in those activities for selfish reasons. If we live a self-focused life, we feed our inner animal even when we pray or study.

**Changing Our Focus to What G-d Wants of Us**

But if we change the focus to what G‑d wants, we feed our G‑dly soul instead. When we eat, when we sleep, when we work, and when we exercise. Because it’s not about what we do, but why we do it.8

That’s the secret of the soul. That’s how we connect to it. To paraphrase the words of [Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1971101/jewish/What-Are-You-Needed-For.htm): By asking less, “What do I need?” and asking more, “What am I needed for?”

To end with a story: On his deathbed, the legendary sage Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai remarked, “I don’t know which path I’m headed towards.”9 It’s a remark that has spawned centuries of commentary. How could Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai—a man who devoted his entire life to passionate Torah study10–not know if he was destined for Heaven or Hell?

The Rebbe offers a simple answer: Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai lived his entire life focused on one question—What does G‑d want from me now? Questions like, “Am I feeling this?” “Where am I holding?” “Does this work for me?” never entered his mind. It was only on his deathbed that he pondered, for the first time, where he was headed, and discovered that he had no idea. He’d literally never thought about it before.11

This is the truest expression of the soul—to look beyond the stale boundaries of the self and find the Divine within.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef1a6058919) Tanya, ch. 1.

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef2a6058919) Chapter 2.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef3a6058919) Derech Mitzvosecha, *Mitzvat Periyah vereviyah.*Tanya, ch. 37.

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef4a6058919) Tanya, ch. 9.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef5a6058919) See Tanya, chapters 18 and onwards.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef6a6058919) See Hayom Yom, 23 Av.

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef7a6058919) Torat Menachem, 5721, ד"ה דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef8a6058919) Tanya, ch. 7.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef9a6058919) Berachot 28b.

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef10a6058919) Sukkah 28a.

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/6058919/jewish/How-to-Get-in-Touch-With-Your-Soul.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22footnoteRef11a6058919) Torat Menachem 5712, ד"ה ויקח הוי' אלקים את האדם.

*Reprinted from the current website of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech 5783**

These final parshiyot of the Torah always coincide with the approaching end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. This is in line with the contents of these parshiyot which contain the review of Moshe’s career as the leader of Israel and of his life and achievements. So too does the end of the year demand of us a review, if not of our entire past life, at least a review and accounting of our actions during the past year.

Moshe’s review is really the main contents of the book of Dvarim itself. Though it recalls historical and national events, there is no doubt that Moshe himself is the central figure of the book. He records for us his personal feelings and candidly admits as to his disappointments and frustrations. But he never departs from his central mission of reminding the people of Israel of the unbreakable covenant that has been formed between them and their Creator.



That covenant is renewed again in this week’s parsha. It is no exaggeration to assert that it is constantly renewed and at the year’s end we are reminded of this. That is the essential essence of remembrance that characterizes this special season of the year. Remembrance brings forth judgment and accountability and leads to an eventual renewal of faith.

Moshe reminds the people that the future is also contained in their remembrance of the covenant. All the generations past, present and future are bound together in this covenant of accountability. And through this process, the mortal Moshe gains immortality, as all of us can acquire this immortality through our loyalty to the covenant.

Moshe at the end of his life has in no way lost his acumen, strength or vision. He leaves this world in perfect health and free of bodily ailments and restraints. Yet he tells us in this week’s parsha that he “can no longer go forth and return.” For humans exist by the will of God and when that will decrees the end of life then the human being will cease to function on this earth. Who can claim greater merits in this world than Moshe had? Yet the hand of human mortality struck him down.

Part of the great lesson of Torah is that life continues without us necessarily being present. Moshe sees far into the distant future but knows that he will not be present to see those events actually unfold. He harkens back to the covenant of remembrance as being the instrument of his continuing presence throughout all of Jewish history.

As long as the covenant is remembered and observed, Moshe is still present with Israel. It is this covenant that defines us as a people and even as individuals. Our relationship to it is under constant heavenly review. It should be self-evident that for our part we should enthusiastically renew our allegiance to it at this fateful part of our life and year.

Shabat shalom

*Reprinted from the rabbiwein.com website*