

## Part XVI

**Believer:** The way we are today, we often perceive the very tools of liberation as restriction. My mind may decide on a course of action to realize my deeper potentials, and yet, I have to force myself to follow this course because my physical, animalistic self, which basically relates more to what is immediate and concrete than to conceptual knowledge, remains unconvinced. As a result, it is possible for me to be drawn to things which hinder me from realizing my true essence and purpose. I must therefore choose: Do I want a “higher”, more “spiritual” freedom? Or do I prefer the so-called “freedom” to succumb to my every instinct, no matter how superficial or perverse? There is, however, a third option, what you called “The Messianic Way to Stop Smoking.” A person can understand something so thoroughly and completely that it is no less tangible and real to him than something that he sees before his eyes. When the self-destructiveness of smoking is as obvious as the need to eat. When the dictum “what is hateful to you do not do to your fellow” is sensed to be as basic to our humanness as the need to think and employ our intelligence. When being true to the purpose of one’s creation is not only “restriction” but an expression of the most basic freedom of them all--the freedom to be oneself.

**Skeptic:** What it boils down to is that you're telling me what my true self is. But what if I'm perfectly satisfied with the “me” that I know? Why should I fight the way that I am now?

**Skeptic:** You say that G-d created me in His image---but you apply this only to some deeper, quintessential self which desires only good. The rest of me--indeed, the only “me” that I know--resists it. Is this what G-d wants---that I spend my life fighting my own nature?

**Believer:** Why must a seed rot in order to germinate and yield fruit? Why must we sink a foundation in order to raise a building? Why must we risk loss in order to profit? Why must we experience pain in order to appreciate joy?

**Skeptic:** You're saying that this is the way things are--- that there is no advance without retreat, no gain without pain. But why is it that way?

**Believer:** Let me tell you a story.

**Skeptic:** You always have a story...

**Believer:** It's usually the best way to get your point across. I think it was Rabbi Nachman of Breslav who said, “The world says that tales put people to sleep. I say that with tales you can rouse people from their sleep.” Anyway, here's my story: A wealthy nobleman was touring his estate and came upon a peasant pitching hay. The nobleman was fascinated by the flowing motions of the peasant's arms and shoulders and the graceful sweep of the pitchfork through the air. He so greatly enjoyed the spectacle that, on the spot, he struck a deal with the peasant: for ten rubles a day, the peasant agreed to come to the mansion and model his hay-pitching technique in the nobleman's drawing room. The next day, the peasant arrived at the mansion, hardly concealing his glee at his new line of “work.” After swinging his empty pitchfork for over an hour, he collected his ten rubles---many times his usual take for a week of backbreaking labor. But by the following day, his enthusiasm had somewhat abated. Several days later he announced to his master that he is quitting his new commission. The nobleman said to the peasant: “I don't understand. Why would you rather do heavy labor outdoors, in the bitter winter cold and sweltering summer heat, when you can perform such an effortless task in the comfort of my home and earn many times your usual pay?” “But master,” said the peasant, “I don't see the work.”

**Skeptic:** You're saying that for life to be meaningful it must challenge us: there must be something that resists our efforts, so that we are not merely going through the motions but actually doing something. But why must we be challenged by our own nature? Why could we not have been born with a clear picture of who and what we truly are? There would still be much outside of ourselves to improve and transform.

**Believer:** I think that your question answers itself. What greater challenge is there?

G-d wanted to involve us in His creation in a truly meaningful way, so He provided us with the ultimate challenge: the challenge to transcend ourselves. Nothing that man can create can be more of an accomplishment than his recreation of himself.

**Skeptic:** Life as work, work as life. I know that Job said “Man is born to labor”, but did it ever occur to you that there may be another way of looking at life? Instead of Mission, Purpose, Challenge, and Achievement, why not life as a party? Or better yet, life as a lazy afternoon in the sun...?

**Believer:** Tell me this: how many happy retirees do you know?