

# Hanan Harchol : Jewish Food For Thought

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Exhibition Catalogue & Commentary

Published in conjunction with the exhibition

**Hanan Harchol: Jewish Food for Thought**

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York

October 3rd, 2013 – June 27th, 2014

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York

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Exhibition Design/Installation: Brian Zegeer

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All animations written, drawn, and animated by Hanan Harchol (Harchol impersonated his parents' voices in the animations)

Study Guides written by Rabbi Leora Kaye.

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***Jewish Food For Thought: The Animated Series*** was created with generous funding by **The Covenant Foundation**, with fiscal sponsorship by **The Foundation for Jewish Culture**.

This exhibition, catalogue and commentary were produced with the generous support of **The Covenant Foundation**.

This exhibition is presented by the **Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Center for Jewish Learning and Culture** at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, with the support of **George, z"l, and Mildred Weissman**.

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ISBN: 1-884300-50-2

Printed in the United States of America in 2013 by  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Brookdale Center, One West Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10012-1186





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Installation Shot of *Hanan Harchol: Jewish Food For Thought*  
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York  
(View from Petrie Great Hall into Joseph Gallery)

Paintings, hanging graphic novel and text tapestries, animation projection



# About the Exhibition

## **HANAN HARCHOL: JEWISH FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York  
(October 3rd, 2013 through June 27th, 2014)

Multi-media visual artist Hanan Harchol mines personal family dynamics to illuminate the relevance of Jewish wisdom in contemporary life. Conversations between the artist and his parents, depicted in animated videos and powerful, expressionist drawings, animated stills, and tapestries, offer unexpected perspectives on the themes of Envy, Repentance, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Love & Fear, Humility, and Faith. Humorous and initially touching family interactions gradually reveal a deeper study of the human condition.

The starkly drawn images, limited in physical action and set in an unchanging, compressed background setting, reflect the artist's influence by the early 20th-century German expressionist masters who eschewed naturalism to convey a deeper articulation of emotional and psychological experience. Distraction is banished by the deliberate absence of color and extraneous detail, focusing the viewer's attention on the verbal exchanges. Harchol's choice of the animation medium, as in the work of William Kentridge, provides a riveting, experiential integration of subject, style, and format that conveys the artist's ultimate message.

Harchol places Judaism at the center of his art, not by illustrating ancient biblical and Talmudic stories, but by finding Jewish teachings in ancient texts that he then applies to everyday life. Harchol is at pains to make the conversations non-judgmental. These animations exert an ecumenical outreach and are intellectually and spiritually available to all.

Harchol's works offer a uniquely accessible yet rich exploration of centuries of Jewish wisdom, which can be put to practical use and universally appreciated. Hanan Harchol seeks to help repair the world by sharing insights that can enhance the fulfillment and meaning of our own lives.

**Laura Kruger**

**Curator, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York**

# INTRODUCTION

## Foreword

**Rabbi David Ellenson**

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and our Museum are honored to join with The Covenant Foundation in imparting the creations of Hanan Harchol to a wide audience of viewers. His provocative and thoughtful Torah will challenge and comfort those who engage with his work – whether you have seen it before or are now encountering it for the first time.

While there is a widespread myth that Jewish tradition and the arts are antithetical to one another and that Judaism lacks a visual tradition, nothing could be further from the truth. Jewish values and Jewish identity have been expressed in countless ways in visual representations of Jewish ritual objects and on diverse Jewish topics throughout history, and HUC-JIR has been proud over the years to present many of these artistic expressions through our Museum to the general public.

The work of Hanan Harchol is now part of this vital Jewish artistic tradition that the College-Institute has sought to offer the community. Through his artistry, Harchol demonstrates the truth the ancient rabbi Ben Bag Bag uttered two millennia ago in *Pirkei Avot* (Chapters of the Fathers) 5:22, when he said, “Turn it (Torah) and turn it over again, for everything is in it.” In Harchol’s talented hands, there is a seamless transition between Judaism and art. He has the capacity to employ animation and the animated short to convey the enduring values and wisdom inherent in Jewish text and story in a contemporary medium to the public. Harchol adds a new chapter to the relationship that exists between Torah and art, and he permits the “*shivim panim* (seventy faces) of Torah” – the infinite meanings contained in Torah – to speak in novel and captivating ways to modern persons in search of the insights and wisdom that Torah can provide. We are appreciative of his wisdom and his talents, and the College-Institute is grateful for the privilege of disseminating and displaying his work.

**Rabbi David Ellenson, Ph.D.**

**President, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion**



**Teshuvah**, 2013, (detail) 6 feet x 5 feet, acrylic on canvas

# The Covenant Foundation

## Foreword

**Eli Evans**

On behalf of The Covenant Foundation I am delighted to congratulate multimedia visual artist Hanan Harchol on this exhibition and his completion of nine thought-provoking animations. The Foundation has long believed that the arts are a powerful way to engage and inspire, and throughout our twenty-three years can count an array of support for artists: puppeteer and television personality Shari Lewis, playwright Liz Swados, artist Toby Kahn, and choreographer Liz Lerman among our grantees; and, of course, Covenant Award Recipients, singer and songwriter Debbie Friedman, z"l, and photographer Zion Ozeri.

We believe that the arts are a crucial portal to fostering common Jewish identity and enriching an inspired Jewish community, often sparking public dialogue. In fact, the Jewish community writ large is an artful and an art-filled community . . . and talkative too.

Hanan Harchol's animations serve as a combination of the principles that the Foundation holds most dear. First, we at Covenant believe in betting on people who voluntarily take up the torch to illuminate who we are, combining the spiritual, intellectual, and historical in their storytelling. Clearly, there is no better example of this concept than Harchol, a talented artist who is also a filmmaker.

Next, we believe that Jewish identity is not taught. It is conveyed by example, and embraced in the context of relationships. One need only take a few short minutes to watch one of these animations to be inspired by the experiential nature of this art form.

Finally, The Covenant Foundation from the beginning has sought out common ground. These animations have surpassed one hundred thousand viewings, and links to them can be found on websites from across the spectrum – from Aish Ha'Torah to American Public Media's *On Being* website, hosted by Krista Tippett.

Upon reflection, this medium is subversive: because a drawing is one step removed from reality and when we watch an animation or cartoon, we tend to let our guard down. In the hands of Hanan Harchol these works are at times funny and exaggerated in mannerisms and tone, but always true to life. His talent allows us to access hearts and minds in a deeper way, which is especially impressive when dealing with this rich and meaningful subject matter.

**Eli Evans**

**Chairman of the Board  
The Covenant Foundation**

# Preface

Harlene Winnick Appelman

According to Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his introduction to *The Prophets* (1962):

***One must forget many clichés in order to behold a single image. Insight is the beginning of perceptions to come rather than the extension of perceptions gone by.***

Heschel defines what is so compelling about the work of Hanan Harchol. Time after time, Harchol eschews the cliché and brings insight of the human condition into animated reality. It is in his amusing and poignant dialogues between family members that one watches the teaching of our rabbis come alive. And it is precisely these insightful dialogues that allow both the insider and the outlier to identify and find gentle provocation to consider his or her own life a little more seriously.

From forgiveness to envy, from greed to the essence of love, Hanan Harchol is fearless about embracing these often shunned –or worse, trivialized – topics, and relentless in mining the essence of these values in Jewish texts.

Harchol's product is the type of timely, thoughtful, and challenging work that The Covenant Foundation admires and supports. The medium and the message are worthy of note. To be clear, the Foundation is equally impressed with his creations as it is with his journey. Hanan has seen his art as a way to introduce a small piece of humane behavior through Jewish texts to the universal as well as the particular.

He has discovered and revealed the deep meaning in Jewish text, and through his family, brought the viewer along on his personal journey.

It is an honor and privilege to join with Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in bringing the work of Hanan Harchol to you.

**Harlene Winnick Appelman**  
**Executive Director**  
**The Covenant Foundation**



# My Jewish Journey: Lost & Found—An Animator's Tale

Hanan Harchol

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**The artist describes the personal journey that led to this project and reconnected him with his Jewish roots.**

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*From the Summer 2013 issue of Reform Judaism Magazine ([reformjudaismmag.org](http://reformjudaismmag.org)), a Union for Reform Judaism publication.*

I was two-and-a-half when my parents packed our few possessions and moved from a kibbutz on the banks of the Sea of Galilee to the promised land of New Jersey—where my father, a nuclear physicist, aspired to become a millionaire.

For my father, moving to America meant our family would have to assimilate. He often lamented my given name. "I'm so sorry we called you Hanan," he'd say, "but we didn't know, how could we know?" One day he declared (he had a way of declaring things, like a king) that he was changing his name from Micha to Michael. "From now on," he proclaimed, "you will all call me Michael." There were, however, two problems with this name change. First, my mother continued to call him Micha in public, which infuriated him; second, he would introduce himself as Ma-eeeeee-KEL, which prompted people to say "What?" So, eventually, he returned to Micha.

My father also announced that we must stop speaking Hebrew—but my mother would have none of it. Eventually, they reached a compromise: he would converse in Hebrew with her, and in English with my sister and me. Whatever she may have promised to my father, my mother spoke to us in a mixture of Hebrew and English, switching to all Hebrew when she screamed at us, which happened more often than not. My sister and I can speak Hebrew today thanks to my mother's perseverance and temper.



*Still of Hanan and his father from "Jewish Food for Thought: The Animated Series" ([jewishfoodforthought.com](http://jewishfoodforthought.com)).*

Following in my parents' footsteps, I grew up anti-religious. My father deemed religion "a waste of time," an attitude he'd inherited from his father, who rejected the faith of his Orthodox parents at age 20, when he became a socialist Zionist and helped found a kibbutz in then Palestine. Still, whenever my father wanted to prove a point, he'd tell us a Torah story and argue, "Even in the Bible, it says..."

When I was 11 1/2, my parents divorced, and my mother began taking my sister and me to shul once a year, on erev Yom Kippur. The services were daunting and emotionally exhausting. All I could think about were the things I had done wrong, and whether or not I would be written into the Book of Life.

My mother also began taking me to annual seders held at the home of her coworker, Mrs. Prince, a compassionate, kind, and very observant Jewish woman. They were a delight; I got to ask lots of questions, eat delicious food, and engage with my Jewish heritage in a meaningful way, albeit for one evening a year.

In college I majored in art, and, after flirting with abstract impressionism, found my voice as a "psychological narrative painter," focusing on my family. In graduate school, I added video and animation, which enabled me to mimic my parents' Jewish mannerisms and Israeli accents.

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It wasn't until I was 39, married, and working as a high school art teacher that my relationship to Judaism changed. A friend told me about a project seeking Jewish artists. I submitted my animations and was selected as one of 11 contemporary video artists to create a short film interpreting segments of the *haggadah* for "Projecting Freedom: Cinematic Interpretations of the Haggadah." Though I was initially hesitant to devote a great deal of time to the year-long project, two aspects appealed to me: the chance to make new work (I hadn't produced any in nearly a year), and the assurance of artistic freedom. So I accepted.

There was one catch, however. The artists had to attend monthly Passover-related text study sessions, led by the project's creator, Rabbi Leon Morris, who directed the Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning at Temple Emanu-El in Manhattan.

To my surprise, these sessions immersed us in deep conversations about the human condition, psychology, and philosophy—topics I'd never before associated with Judaism, and precisely the same issues I had been exploring in my artmaking. I became increasingly drawn to Jewish text study and Rabbi Morris' compassionate approach to Judaism, which reminded me of the meaningful experiences I'd had at Mrs. Prince's seder table.

For the topic in my portion of the *haggadah* video project I chose *maror* (bitter herbs), because the protagonist in my animations, my father, was often, well...bitter. At this point I needed good sources for my video that would also reflect the content we explored in our text study sessions. So, at age 39, I began to read the Torah seriously. I stumbled upon a short passage, *Parashat Bo*: "And on this night, they shall eat the flesh, roasted over the fire, and unleavened cakes; with bitter herbs they shall eat it" (Exodus 12:8). Reading these words catapulted me back to a passage we would read each year in the *haggadah* at Mrs. Prince's seder: to fulfill the minimum obligation of a Passover seder, one must discuss three things—the *Pesach* offering, the matzah, and the bitter herbs. Somehow, finding the source of that passage in the Torah was strangely exciting, as if I had discovered something new.

I then began to wonder why *maror*, of all things, was included

as one of the three essential seder elements. I concluded that without the bitterness there could be no freedom. That led to another realization: While my parents were unquestionably bitter, behind their bitterness was a distinct sense of hope. My parents' bitterness seemed to have a larger purpose: the idea that bitterness is a part of life, but that if one chooses to believe, hope, and persevere despite the bitterness—or perhaps even because of it—one could reach another level. With this short little passage from Exodus (Parashat Bo, 12:8), I had found the theme for my animation. I felt moved to continue reading the Torah and see what else was there.



The more I studied Torah and rabbinic commentaries, the more I came to see that many of my parents' ways of arguing, reasoning, and questioning were steeped in the sacred wisdom of our ancestors. I also identified in Judaism many teachings on human values and the human condition that I had explored in my psychological narrative artwork and had previously attributed to modern psychology and philosophy instead. For example, I had always thought that practicing introspection—studying one's own behavioral patterns, asking oneself where one learned them, and through awareness of these behaviors changing them—was a modern psychological tool, but it turned out that this analytical process had been detailed in the 12th century by the great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides! Moreover, in the 17th century the Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Chasidic movement, taught that God created other people as mirrors, allowing us to see our own faults in others—an insight I had attributed to Sigmund Freud. And I discovered the basis of empathy in a teaching of Hillel, one of our finest sages: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." I wondered: *How much of who I am as a person and as an artist is rooted in thousands of years of Jewish thought and study?* And I thought: *What a shame it is that in the process of becoming non-religious, I had missed out on this wealth of Jewish teachings and wisdom on the human condition.*

That's when I got the idea of making Torah wisdom accessible to non-religious people like myself. I would create animated conversations between my parents and me, calling it "Jewish Food For Thought: The Animated Series." With a Covenant Foundation grant, I took a leave from my teaching job and studied with dozens of rabbis

and other Jewish scholars (who, in the process, become life-changing mentors).

Curiously, my father developed a strong interest in the project and became one of my teachers. We held lengthy conversations about many topics, portions of which made their way into the animations. Often we communicated via Skype. Once, with my infant son Benjamin sitting on my lap, I shared the Torah passage commanding us to *Love your fellow as yourself* and the accompanying commentary noting that Rabbi Akiva considered this the greatest principle of the Torah. Suddenly my father burst out into a Hebrew song that summarized Akiva's teachings which he'd learned on the kibbutz as a child. Both Benjamin and I were smiling broadly as my father sang the song.

The animations took an immense amount of research. Each source pointed to more sources, leading to more questions. One scholar led me in one direction; the next took me elsewhere. Contradictions and questions proved essential to the process.

In this way, I gained a new understanding of Yom Kippur—that to make mistakes is human. What matters is how we handle ourselves after we've made a mistake. Judaism provides a process of acknowledging the mistake, apologizing, expressing remorse, fixing what can be fixed, and most importantly, looking honestly inside of oneself to see how the mistake happened and to improve so as not to repeat it. Suddenly, both my own mistakes and those of others became opportunities. Forgiveness was an opportunity to let go of resentment towards a person who had wronged me, or as Rabbi Abraham Twerski put it: "Stop letting the person live rent free inside of your head!"

These insights were reflected in my first two animations, "Repair" (on the theme of *t'shuvah*, or return) and "Landlord" (on the theme of forgiveness), released prior to the High Holy Days in 2011 and shown widely, including at the 2011 URJ Biennial.

At the same time I completed a rough draft of the third episode of the series, "You Can Dance" (on the theme of gratitude), based on conversations with my father. My dad was feeling depressed because he felt he had not achieved in life as much as he'd hoped. I tried to ease his unhappiness by sharing a teaching from *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of Our Sages): "Who is rich? Those who rejoice in their own portion." Being grateful connects you to the present moment, I pointed out, instead of living in the future of expectations or the

past of regrets. And being in the present moment, through gratitude, allows you to actually take in and truly experience how much you really have. My father was able to follow the logic of this teaching, but he remained unconvinced.

Shortly after this encounter, my father became ill and died. He was buried on the shores of the Galilee near the kibbutz of his youth. I began to go to *shul* every Saturday to say *Kaddish* for him. One Shabbat, a congregant informed me that, traditionally, a Jew was required to recite *Kaddish* for only 11 months—I had actually overdone it by a couple of weeks. I continued to go to *shul*, but not standing up to say *Kaddish* left me feeling strange and empty. I found myself looking forward to my father's first *yahrzeit*, when I would have the opportunity to say *Kaddish* again.

On that day, I was called to the *bimah* in honor of my father's first *yahrzeit*. I recited the Torah blessing—and saw, to my amazement, that the Torah portion I was called up for happened to be Exodus, *Parashat Bo*, 12:8, the *very* text I had stumbled upon four years earlier when I began reading Torah seriously for the first time!

At that moment, everything seemed to fit. I saw my father taking us out of Israel to America as the beginning of the journey that would return me to the Jewish roots of my grandparents before they immigrated to Israel and gave up their religion. I was returning to something never lost, but simply hidden. ■

Hanan Harchol

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Top: **Looking In Other People's Windows**, 2013, (Animated Still)

Right: **Gratitude**, 2013, 15 inches x 15 inches, ink on paper





HANAN HARCHOL

# Contemporary JEWISH AMERICAN Artist

Professor Matthew Baigell

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**Matthew Baigell is Professor Emeritus of Art History at Rutgers University. He has published over twenty books on American and Jewish American art.**

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**H**anan Harchol, still in his early forties, is among the most important artists of his generation. When the annals of early twenty-first century Jewish American art are written, he will be acknowledged as a leading figure who found through the use of modern techniques a way to bind his art to the long history of Jewish culture. He might very well be the representative figure among those acculturated Jewish Americans who nevertheless find great value in exploring their Jewish heritage based on deep and serious study.

His art does not reflect what has been called post-Jewish memory based largely on second- and third-hand knowledge of that history or by finding value in, one must admit, superficial Jewish connections such as visiting parents and grandparents in Florida or eating certain foods. Rather, Harchol places Judaism at the center of his art, not by illustrating ancient biblical and Talmudic stories but by finding in the ancient texts ethical and moral lessons that he applies to contemporary life. He does so by presenting these in animations depicting discussions of often thorny topics between himself and his parents. In this regard, he is among those whom we can call post, post-modern artists because they reject post-modernism's use of irony and dissembling for the desire to communicate to their audiences their spiritual values and authentic feelings. Their exploration of religious sources also places them among contemporary post-secular artists in that they have rejected the insistent secularism of much twentieth-century art. Some find inspiration in the stories they find in the ancient texts. Harchol instead discovers his subject matter in their ethical and moral precepts.

Since his childhood, Harchol has looked at and studied the works of many artists. The question, then, is not one of influences insofar as he did not mature in a medieval or Renaissance workshop under the guidance of a single master without recourse to art magazines and museums. Rather, it is with which artists he felt most compatible. He highlights three who continue to be crucial influences – Max Beckmann because of his rejection of traditional classicism for a visceral type of expressionism; Ida Applebroog for her side-by-side placement of drawn figurative images within a single work that create psychological narratives; and William Kentridge for his animated narratives in which protagonists representing the artist invoke the horrors of apartheid in his native South Africa. Much more important, then, are Harchol's transformations that led to his signature style and subject matter. He calls himself a psychological narrative artist. One might just as well call his art a continuous exercise in fearless self-revelment based on sometimes unpleasant family dynamics that ultimately metamorphosed into principled issues grounded in biblical thought. In effect, he elevated family interactions to ethical and moral issues and raised the autobiographical to the level of the universal. His art, at its most basic level, remains a family narrative with Harchol, initially the object of fatherly advice and criticism, evolving into a mature adversary and knowledgeable discussant in family debates. Harchol's

**You Can Dance**, 2012, (Animated Still)

subject matter is, above all, a visual diary of his developing intellectual and psychological strength and, not least, his spiritual growth.

Born in Kibbutz Kinneret, Israel, in 1970, he moved with his family to New Jersey two years later. He remembers drawing from a very young age. As a high school student from 1984 to 1988, he found art to be an outlet for coping with his evidently angry, aggressive, and occasionally abusive father. Early works reveal that his surfaces were filled with heavy, slashing brushwork and strong color that conveyed his childhood fears and anxieties of coping with a family environment in which his unpredictable father was, in Harchol's words, "the king of the household." These emotions were especially conveyed through both facial caricatures, his expressive staring, and his father's glaring eyes.

While in college from 1988 to 1992, Harchol explored his family relationships in multi-part paintings that did not so much suggest sequential narratives but rather episodes, both real and symbolic, in his life at home. These are both disturbing and brutally honest, perhaps a way to exorcise his anger at the break-up of his parents' marriage as well as his difficult and testy bond with his father. In one work, *Untitled* (1992), he appears to be hospitalized, wrapped in bandages, his body approximating a crucified figure. Harchol explains that this painting represents the time of his parents'



separation during which he was hospitalized for severe eczema and was literally wrapped from head to toe in cortisone-filled bandages. But metaphorically, the work hinges upon the notion that in the battles between his parents, he, the child, was the one most seriously wounded and ultimately sacrificed.

In the eight years between graduating from college and entering graduate school, he continued to examine his early family experiences. In one horrifying tri-partite painting, *Untitled* (1998), each image grows more and more violent as his father spans the toddler-aged



*Untitled*, 1998, 6 feet x 12 feet, acrylic on canvas



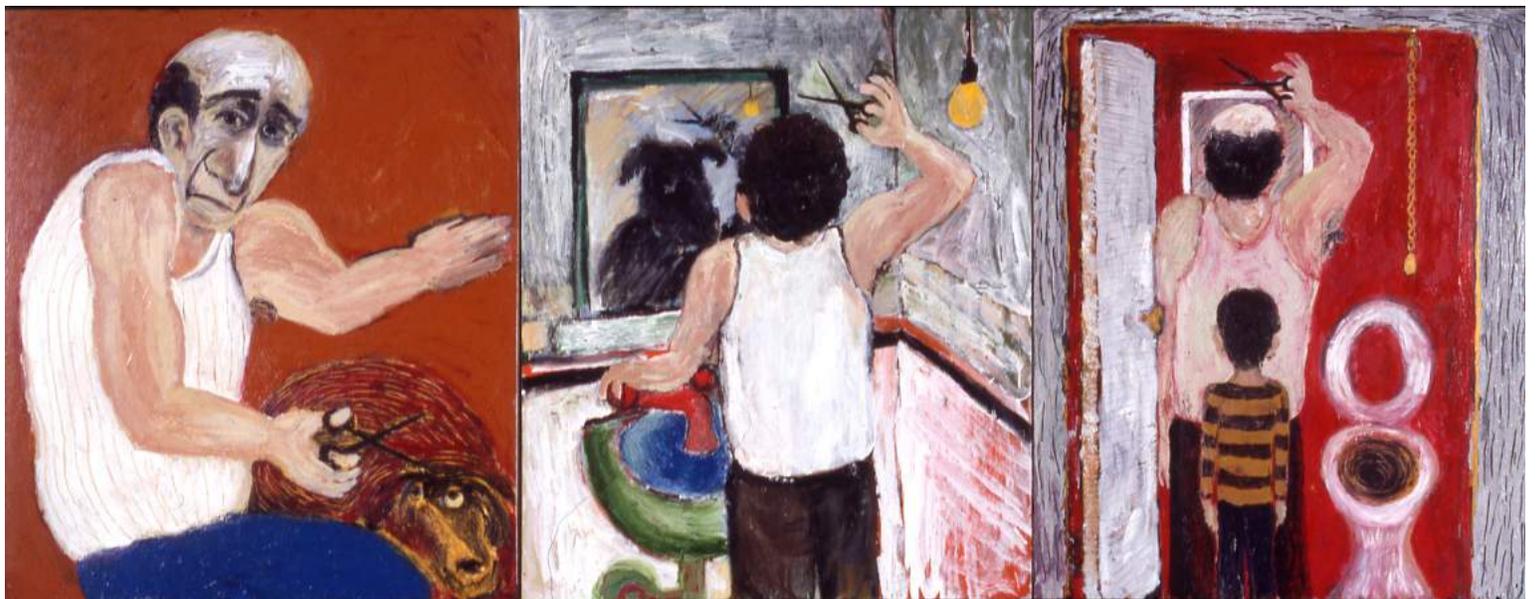
**Untitled**, 1992, 6 feet x 16 feet, acrylic on canvas

artist until his will is broken and he cries. In the following year, another tri-partite painting shows his father cutting the hair of a dog as a symbol of shame and fear. And in the central panel, Harchol cuts his own hair, an image of self-debasement insofar as he sees his mirror image as a dog.

In graduate school from 2000 to 2002, Harchol began to explore time-based media and began to introduce humor into his work. He explains: "I found that humor disarmed the viewer and allowed me to explore more deeply and effectively with my subject matter." He

began with live video pieces of himself in which he filmed himself imitating his father's Israeli accent and impersonating his mannerisms. Harchol also began creating stop-time video animations that developed into his signature continuous-time animations to which he added imitations of his parents' voices to his own.

Two works sum up this period in his career. *The Trial* (2002), a large, multi-media presentation, includes video monitors, paintings, drawings, laser transfers, and texts framing his family experiences. It summarizes the past. *Witnessing Sacrifice* (2003), on the other hand, points to the future. It, too, is a multi-media piece that includes acrylic painting, a video monitor with animation and, perhaps most important, Jewish texts included for the first time in his art. In the video, Harchol's father cuts his son's hair as they have a conversation about his father's girlfriend and the problems of aging, a combination of the old sense of debasement with a newfound sympathy for his father as he faces old age. Harchol's mother's ovaries and fallopian tubes surround her womb, which houses the video monitor. The Hebrew passage at the top is a quote from the Binding of Isaac at the point in which Abraham receives God's blessing to "exceedingly multiply thy seed" as a reward for Abraham's willingness to sacrifice



**Untitled**, 1998, 6 feet x 15 feet, acrylic on canvas



**The Trial, 2002**

9 feet x 18 feet x 2 feet, multimedia installation: acrylic on canvas, video monitors, laser transfers

...saw, water never penetrated



This explains why he was



...stander near dis



...begins to stand up at

verdict, he blasphemed with em.

This was called to his attention.



his son. The quote at the bottom records Delilah asking Samson about the source of his strength so that he might be “bound and tortured.” Both citations refer to the survival of the male figures as stand-ins for Harchol.

Although Harchol understood that his values were derived from that heritage through his parents, he was not yet ready to commit himself to connecting his art so intimately with his Jewish heritage. As he indicated in 2004 (here paraphrased), he realized that he was guided by his Jewish heritage even though he was raised in a secular household and had little religious knowledge. In 2009, however, he notes, “I was commissioned to create a short animation that interpreted the eating of bitter herbs during Passover. As part of my project, I was mandated to participate in a monthly Jewish study group and, to my surprise, I discovered that the human themes we were discussing and wrestling with in the Jewish text study were precisely the kind I had always been exploring in my personal art making.” He then realized how Jewish his art was and he then began his serious study of the Torah as a source for future animations.

This exhibition represents Harchol’s work over the past four years derived from his immersion in Jewish study. He wants to apply its wisdom to the contemporary human condition by combining his personal history –his family narrative –with visual art. The exhibition is divided into seven themes: Repentance, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Love and Fear combined, Envy, Humility, and Faith. Each of the video animations takes one of the seven themes in which the father and son (and sometimes Harchol’s mother) discuss the issues as persons with sometimes strongly differing opinions. They argue now as intellectual equals. On occasion, Harchol gives his father advice. Aside from the human elements, although obviously important in their own right, what is most interesting is that Harchol clearly articulates the issues from more than one point of view. The conversations proceed in a dazzling point-counter-point manner that allow the viewer to follow the logic of each position. The easy-to-understand but very knowledgeable manner in which they are presented often prompts the viewer to raise questions as well as have the desire to literally join the animated conversations on the monitor screen.

As an artist interested in ecumenical outreach, Harchol strives to make the conversations non-preachy and, although based on religious Jewish texts, intellectually and spiritually available to atheists and the devoutly religious as well as affiliated and unaffiliated Jews and people of other faiths. In short, he wants to, as he has said, “build upon the wealth of wisdom in our heritage while applying



Top Left: **The Nuclear Physicist Peels Oranges**, 2001, (Video Still)

Center Left: **The Nuclear Physicist Sings to the Seventies**, 2001, (Animated Still)

Bottom Left: **The Nuclear Physicist Gives His Son A Haircut**, 2003, (Animated Stills)

Right: **Witnessing Sacrifice**, 2003, 10 feet x 8 feet, multimedia installation:  
acrylic on canvas, video monitor, laser transfers

כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת-בִּגְדֵי בְנֵי אֶת-יְחִידֶךָ: כִּי-בָרַךְ אֶבְרָכְךָ וְהִרְבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת-יִרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שֶׁפֶת הַיָּם



וְהִתְאַמַּר דְּלִילָה אֶל-שֶׁמֶשׁוֹן הַגִּידָה-נָא לִי בַמָּה פָחַךְ גְּדוֹל וּבַמָּה תֵאסֵר לְעֲנוּתְךָ:

that wisdom to our contemporary experiences." He finds animated video to be a very accessible and visceral vehicle for fulfilling his intentions.

Within the history of Jewish American art, Harchol's work appears to be unique. For example, acclaimed artists such as Ellen Holtzblatt, Jill Nathanson, and David Wander have made narratives based on biblical stories in which the narratives serve as vehicles for their own stories. The biblical passages serve as points of departure; the artists and their works take primacy over the biblical passages. Holtzblatt, in *Hamabul* (based on the Noachian Flood), reads the story in terms of her own concerns for renewed life. In *Seeing Sinai* (2006, four abstract paintings with some Hebrew lettering), Nathanson imagines how Moses, and, by extension, herself, might have felt encountering God during Moses' second ascent of Sinai. Wander, in his sixteen paintings describing Jonah's initial denial and then acceptance of his mission to Ninevah, described in the story his own acceptance of the Deity.

Harchol, by comparison, does not interpret or use biblical passages as a palimpsest, a point of departure for his own thoughts, but allows them to influence strongly his family discussions. We see the three—mother, father, son—working through issues in which each maintains his and her own thoughts and personality, but who also seem guided by biblical reasoning. This is not to say that Harchol's art is better or worse than that of the other artists, but rather to describe its relationship to theirs, and to indicate that with this exhibition he joins them as one of the major Jewish American artists of our time. ■

*Professor Matthew Baigell*



**Installation Shot of Hanan Harchol: Jewish Food For Thought**  
(View from inside Joseph Gallery)

Paintings, graphic novel and text tapestries, animation projection

# Repentance

## תשובה

The gates of repentance are always open and anyone who wishes to enter may enter.

השערים נפתחים בכל שעה...  
— Ethics Rabbah 194

Repentance also comprises the notion that man has a measure of control over his existence in all dimensions, including time. Time flows in one direction; it is impossible to undo or even to alter an action after it has occurred and become an "event," an objective fact. However, even though the past is "fixed," repentance admits of an ascendancy over it, of the possibility of changing its significance in the context of the present and future. This is why repentance has been presented as something created before the world itself. In a world of inexorable flow of time, in which all objects and events are interconnected in a relationship of cause and effect, repentance is the exception: it is the potential for something else.

Whenever a person rises from one level to the next, it necessitates that he first has a descent before the ascent. Because the purpose of any descent is always in order to ascend.

אך כשדועים לצאת ממדרגה גבוהה...  
— Likutey Moharan 22:11

Sins are the essence of melancholy. When the soul undergoes cleansing, it experiences the very essence of its sin, and then does the melancholy of penitence assert itself; a fire of anguish, remorse, shame and a terrifying fear burns inside it. But in this very process it is purified. So that it can afterward return to its state of strength and self-respect.

Sometime, precisely as a person entertains the thought of repentance, he feels agitated with a deep sense of anxiety because of his low state of perfection and his grave deterioration. It is, however, precisely then for him to consider that this awareness and this anxiety are the best signs assuring him of eternal deliverance through the perfection of the self and he should strengthen himself....

הענות הם עצם היגון...  
— Ra' Kukh, The Light of Repentance 9:11-12, 18

© Complete Hebrew quotes are included in the Exhibition Catalogue and Commentary



# Making Morals *Move*

Laura Kruger

To paraphrase the title of Thomas Hoving's exciting behind the scenes view of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Making the Mummies Dance*, I suggest that Hanan Harchol, deeply aware of the contemporary relevance of Jewish wisdom and values, is using his art to make "morals move." Jewish principles and standards of behavior are results of enlightened choice and generational knowledge.

Harchol has developed a visual vocabulary that captures attention and speeds his message along. Film animation has evolved in the past 120 years into a commonplace experience. Prior to the development by the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière in 1894, the technology for presenting sequential drawings mechanically in the form of moving pictures, the art of cinematography, did not exist. The magic of transformation evolved rapidly, at first as a novelty and now as an art form. By 1910, the production of hand-drawn cartoons as animated films was an international phenomenon.

To better understand this arduous process, each movement projected on a screen has been individually hand drawn and is made up of hundreds of minute variations. If the characters move, the background must also be re-drawn to reflect each new vantage point. Visually, one's eye connects the images so that they appear to move. Children playing with 'flip books' make a series of sequential images, either drawings or photographs, that appear to 'move' forward or backward.

Although we are no longer in awe of the magic of animation, a few fine artists have explored the technique. Most notable is William Kentridge (1955, South Africa), who treats the concept as seriously as any other accepted art technique. His animation videos are presented interspersed with drawings, paintings, and tapestries, and

thus become a visual extension of an integrated fine art experience.

Animation lends itself to exaggeration, to characterization, and to a graphic novel style. By broadly limning the subject, focusing attention on simplified forms and avoiding realism, the viewer is riveted by Harchol's compelling images and language. Seemingly simplified, characterization is a form of focus, intensifying and clarifying the subject.

Visually, the bold black outlines that define Harchol's drawings have roots in 19th- and 20th-century art history. Georges Rouault (1871-1958) drew on the isolating effect of dark, silhouetting configurations to define his subjects. Strongly delineated, his subjects are set apart, never blending into the background. The powerful outlines of his subjects echo the technique of medieval stained-glass windows which are girded by their dark lead margins. Another French artist, Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), worked in this strongly outlined black technique and is highly regarded as, among other genres, a cartoonist and political caricaturist. His spontaneous style captured the vigor of his subjects, reinforcing their personalities. And perhaps, most significantly, Harchol is referencing the German Expressionists in his gestural black-and-white drawings. Artists such as Emil Nolde (1867-1956), Max Beckmann (1884-1950), and Erich Heckel (1883-1970), with their stark, expressive, simplified outlines, particularly in their woodcuts, were reacting against a tradition of naturalism in their efforts to convey a deeper articulation of the human condition.

These highly identified image techniques are employed by Harchol to connect and focus his essential subject: the contemporary application



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of Jewish values in daily life. Harchol's style of simplification, emphatic outlines coupled with a repeated tableaux format, demands attention, while nothing extraneous interferes with the core message. Distraction is banished by the deliberate absence of color to accent the animations, focusing the viewer's attention on the message. This is further achieved by limiting the physical action and the seemingly unchanging background setting for the verbal interchanges, which feature the reassuring voice intonations and accents of the characters, in the form of the artist's father and mother.

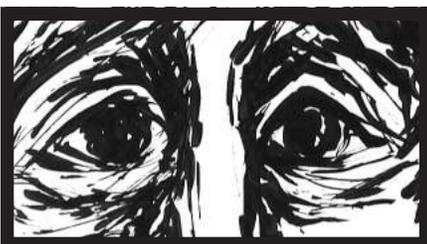
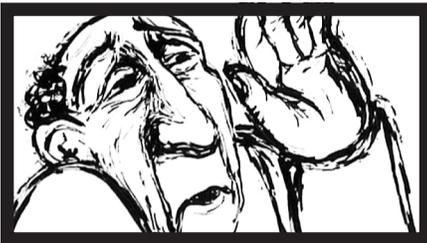
In Hanan Harchol's work, style and format come together to focus the content addressed in the video dialogues. This synergy brings the teachings to life, while making them accessible and enabling the audience to more easily embrace these serious concepts. ■

*Laura Kruger, Curator*

Animated Stills from:

**The Funeral of Uncle Avner**, 2001, **The Nuclear Physicist Goes to the Shrink**, 2002

**You Can Dance**, 2012, and **Looking In Other People's Windows**, 2013



# The Voice THAT DOES NOT CEASE

Maoz Kahana

**J**ews ask questions.

Jews even, and sometimes especially, ask questions about things that appear self-evident. For example, Jews ask questions regarding creativity and art in general, including this particular exhibition. Throughout this museum one can see the handiwork of Hanan Harchol, an animator and a gifted artist. His nine animations on key topics of Judaism (such as envy, repair, faith) have been watched by multitudes on TV and the internet, drawing impassioned responses from a highly diverse audience – Jew and non-Jew alike. Regarding his art I allow myself to ask a basic, primary question, one that will doubtless sound rather odd:

According to Jewish law, artistic creations are certainly permitted, within certain boundaries. However, are they useful? From the Torah's own perspective, is there anything lacking in the Torah that artistic works can bring to light? Mounds of books and commentaries have been written on the Torah, the Mishna, and the Talmud. What is there left to say? Why should one try to add to them?

The greatest revelation in the Torah is the Giving of the Torah itself, in which G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai and gave the Jewish people (and ultimately the entire western world) the Ten Commandments. There are several descriptions of this founding event in the Torah, one of which includes the following verse:

*G-d spoke these matters to your entire congregation, out of the fire, cloud, and mist, a Great Voice that did not continue [lo yasaf]; and He wrote them in two tablets of stone and gave them to me. (Deuteronomy 5:18)*

The revelation at Sinai was thus accompanied by a "Great Voice" – not just a voice, but a Great Voice. Furthermore, this voice "*lo yasaf*." What is the meaning of *lo yasaf*? The plain meaning of this expression is probably that the voice did not continue (similar to the root of the name *Yosef*, Joseph, named by his mother Rachel after her prayers for another son). In other words, the revelation was so special that the Divine Voice was never heard again in the same manner.

However, in addition to the straightforward meaning, every Biblical verse has at least several profound interpretations. One exegetical reading of this verse is extremely ancient (it appears in some of the oldest Aramaic translations of the Torah). Surprisingly enough, according to this interpretation the phrase bears the diametrical opposite meaning: *Lo yasaf* implies that the Voice did not cease. The Great, Heavenly Voice of Mount Sinai continues to this very day.

This interpretation is so peculiar that it is perhaps best viewed as complementary, not contradictory, to the plain meaning. In other words, for someone who listens only to



Top: **Untitled**, 2002  
10 inches x 2 inches, ink on paper

Right: Animated Still from:  
**The Nuclear Physicist Goes to the Shrink**, 2002

voices in this world, the Voice at Sinai has indeed ceased and will never be heard again. The voices we hear around us are those of people quarrelling, screams, a baby's cry, sometimes murmurs of love, perhaps even a beautiful, inspirational song. Yet no Heavenly Voices penetrate our human world.

However, there is another layer of meaning, an interpretation that is far from simple, both with regard to the words of the Torah and its description of reality. According to this explanation, the Torah and the world both allow one to attend in a more profound manner to a Voice that cannot be heard openly, the Voice of the Giving of the Torah that never stopped, and can be heard in the world continuously from the revelation at Sinai. Yet who is listening? Who can hear this Voice? How can one hear it?

This remains an open inquiry, for which each and every generation must offer a fresh answer. Moreover, this is no ordinary question but one that is at the basis of the entire, massive exegetical culture that has grown from the day of the revelation in Sinai until this very day in the year 2013. Who is able to hear this Great, Quiet Voice, and how is this achieved? What does he hear? Each and every volume in the lengthy bookshelf of Jewish culture – Biblical commentary, liturgical songs, kabalistic works, halakhic discourse – provides unique creative responses to this question. Each of them is a transcription of the Great Voice as heard by a particular person in a certain era, by means of his own distinctive cultural sensitivities.

Each generation must attend to the Voice anew, as the unique capabilities of every person and period, together with the sensors through which they grasp the Voice, provide it with fresh, ever-relevant, and exciting meanings.

The dynamic visual art form of computer-assisted animation is a new, exhilarating sensor. One who listens with care, sensitively and candidly, will hear in it an echo of the Great Voice. We see very little physical action on the screens of Hanan Harchol – a father, a son, occasionally a mother, talking, arguing, expressing feelings, and changing their standpoints. Yet this minimalistic narrative provides a vital, honest, profound, and challenging encounter with the most essential and basic concepts of Jewish culture, and with the most relevant questions for the modern Jew, the one who lives in New York or Florida, who drinks coffee in Starbucks, whether he covers his head with the traditional yarmulke or merely with the heavens.

This person – you and I – is not standing at the foot of Mount Sinai, and cannot hear the Voice of G-d speaking to Moses. He hears the latest news about celebrities, sports, and politics. Yet Harchol's work repeatedly claims that this person is also

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capable of hearing the Voice itself. When he ponders the appropriate lifestyle for a competitive, superficial society, the hero of his animation meditates on the various meanings of the commandment: "Do not covet." When he considers whether to request forgiveness from a friend he has wronged he does so by thinking through the Rambam's Laws of Repentance, and the relationship between these laws and a particular Hasidic story. From Genesis he learns about fear, listening, and awe, while a section of the Mishna helps him understand how he should treat a friend who has married somebody with whom he himself was once in love.

Not only are challenging components of modern life infused with deep insights and powerful inspiration by means of the wealth of sources which Harchol's characters are interweaving during their discussions, but these sources themselves are brushed clean of dust when they are analyzed in the heated present discussions between father and son, mother and son, in a vehicle that drives through a virtual script on computer screens.

The Voice at Sinai still reverberates throughout the world. ■

*Dr. Maoz Kahana*



# Hanan's Conversations

Tali Kahana



Anyone who views Hanan Harchol's work, especially his animations, cannot fail to notice one feature they share in common: Every one of them includes a conversation between Hanan and at least one of his parents. In the early animations he converses solely with his father, but in the later ones his mother also joins the discussions.

Why did Hanan choose to convey his ideas in the form of animated conversations? Why not by means of a story, or a description of a situation or an event? Or a legend? Why did he not present some sort of one-act play, or use creatures or animals in his animations?

In Jewish sources, man is described using the Hebrew word *Medaber* — such who can articulate (or one who can speak); the quality that differentiates humans from all other creatures is their capacity for speech. However, not all speech creates a conversation. A conversation is an encounter, a meeting between two people, in which a connection is fashioned, offering intimacy and warmth. When there is no encounter, but instead each side presents his own doctrine, the other party tends to react defensively or go on the attack. Then the speech is spoiled and the conversation is lost and ruined. The Holy Zohar describes this condition as one in which speech is in exile. This can be understood from a psychological perspective as well — the person who attempts to connect with and understand the other is faced with a wall of cynicism, aggressiveness, or miscomprehension. The possibility for a relationship, for internal and external harmony, is gone. The person withdraws inside of themselves, and their presence is diminished. The failure to create a conversation transforms us into internal exiles. However, while corrupt speech means exile, a renewed dialogue can signify an internal redemption.

In Harchol's work, the conversations take place between immediate family members. This is not because these characters will necessarily accept his opinion or make life easier for him; in fact, the reverse is the case — they are chosen because they enable him to hear opposing voices and contrary viewpoints. A true conversation is not one where all its participants agree and express the same ideas, but a meeting between people of diverse qualities and various personal and inter-personal strengths.

Yet it seems to me that on a deeper level Harchol does not encounter people outside of himself. Even the closest relatives, his father and mother, are projections, actors who take on inner aspects of himself in his internal conversations. The archetypal conversational participants include one father, one mother, and a son.

Various parts of Harchol's inner being talk to one another: innocence and criticism; the need for innovation against conservatism; generosity versus egocentrism. These qualities and others sit around a table and converse.

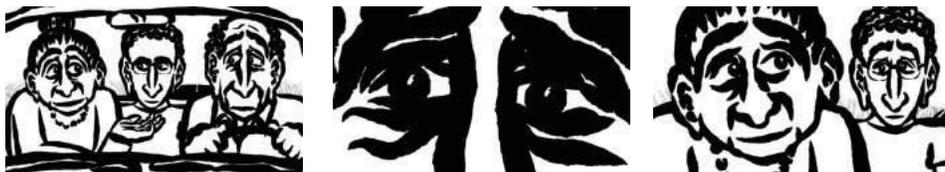
There is never one single solution or prearranged correct answer to a conversation. In Hanan's disputes there are no winners and no losers and no voice is being expelled. All voices are equally important for the creation of a whole person and a fully-rounded picture. It is especially vital for each aspect of the personality to acknowledge the existence of the others.

Furthermore, Harchol's orchestration and *humanization* of these inner voices is original and unexpected. Harchol does not hide himself in dogmatic figures with fixed, predictable characters. The voices are constantly changing, as each figure represents different voices at various times. The character of the father, who is typically cynical and skeptical, can sometimes express himself in a surprisingly naïve and gentle manner. Harchol himself, who generally appears a sensitive soul, can reveal passion and rage, as well as frustration and a sense of hardship.

Here too, Harchol teaches the observer important lessons in human nature: there is no such thing as a person whose character can be pinned down precisely, and the attempt to label people destroys the internal dialogue and renders it superficial. Each of us contains an assortment of voices, and an inner conversation will draw out different voices at various times. The important matter is the realization that the voice of the "other" — even when it opposes or confronts us — is also part of us, and it serves to reconnect us with a voice that has been silenced.

In Judaism, the word *sichah* (conversation), bears two meanings. The first is a conversation between two people, while the second meaning of *sichah* is a plant, a shrub.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov says that each and every shrub has its own unique tune and song. He claims that the shepherd,



the true leader, has the ability to walk in the field and hear the songs of every plant. In Hebrew a leader is called a *dabbar*, a person who possesses the power of speech (*dibbur*), the ability to hear the dissimilar voices and speech of all people and combine them into a conversation. Another meaning of *sichah* in Hebrew is prayer, the capacity to speak with the Creator of the World.

The Jewish people have been dubbed the “people of the Book,” but this title is misleading. Jewish study is always performed by means of speech. The entire treasury of Torah learning, its commentary, laws, and homiletic interpretations dating back to Moshe Rabbeinu, is called the Oral Law. Torah is studied in the *beit midrash* in the form of deliberations between students. Each scholar typically learns with a partner, a *havruta* with whom he analyzes the material. Hence the ancient Jewish saying: “Either friendship, *havruta*, or death.”

However, there is yet another level of meaning to the concept of conversation and speech. The Gemara describes the intimate act of love by the expression: “A woman talks with her husband.” Speech is not merely an exchange of opinions or intellectual debate, but the creation of a bond, intimacy, an act of love.

Harchol’s personality and work reveal special ties between speech and intimacy. The Torah states in the *Shema*: “And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Harchol is a man of love, and therefore in all his dealings with people he does everything with all his heart, soul, and strength. Even in his encounters with the ancient texts of Torah and *Talmud* and Hasidism he behaves like a youth in love: He is curious, passionate, excited, and full of wonder.

Like many from preceding generations, Harchol is not a loner or an isolated intellectual. He learns Torah through his encounters with people, via speech, exchanges, and conversations. Thus Harchol creates loving ties not only between the texts but also between all who participate with him in its creation. In this manner he is able to rework his material and fashion new and refreshing connections with the formative figures of his life, by means of the conversations in which he engages them.

It is through these conversations, not by remaining detached from them, that Harchol is able to engage in dialogue not only with actual people – his interlocutors – but also with social movements, entire communities from the Jewish world and beyond, and even moral and philosophical ideas.

Yet the most vibrant conversation takes place between Harchol and himself, between his inner voices, between new and old, between the apparently conflicting forces within. Harchol successfully creates a conversation that is both real and insightful, while at the same time full of love and kindness. This is the conversation we are privileged to overhear in the work presented in the exhibition.

I am fortunate enough to call myself a *havruta* to Hanan Harchol and, through my conversations with him, a partner to his internal dialogue. This has enriched my own inner conversation, and drawn me closer to the Torah, the Creator, myself, and the people in my life.

Thank you, Hanan. ■

Tali Kahana

**Tali Kahana is a Torah scholar, psychotherapist, and developer of personal and couple therapy methods. Mrs. Kahana received a degree in Talmud and Jewish philosophy from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and earned an M.A. from the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare. Mrs. Kahana also spent over a decade learning at the Israeli yeshivot. Mrs. Kahana conducts extensive individual and couples therapy, focusing on lower socioeconomic populations in Israel.**

Top Left: **Untitled**, 2002  
4 inches x 6 inches, ink on paper

Top Right: Animated Stills from:  
**Love & Fear, (Parts 1, 2, & 3)**, 2012

# Spiritual Physics

in the Art & Teachings  
of Hanan Harchol

Joe Septimus

**H**anan Harchol's work is a pleasant yet rigorous melding of form and content. The genius of the dialectic form is that it carries us with simplicity upon the wings of traditional Jewish learning to a place of universal wisdom. The engaging issues addressed in Hanan's content peel away at the human condition while teaching us "Spiritual Physics" — how things work.

Whereas the term Spiritual Physics may appear to be an oxymoron, I mean to suggest that many developmental aspects of human relationships and our spiritual relationship to people, nature, and beyond, parallel the laws of physics. And conversely, the physical laws that manifest themselves in the world operate in a way that mimics universal laws of the spirit. What undergirds both is God's design choices, contributing to a unified created universe, a world of "Echod."

In Spiritual Physics we observe the laws of reality. One example is the ongoing perpetuation of the created world wherein the created gives birth to creation. Parent to child, seed to tree to fruit to seed, inspiration to idea to art, are not just relationships, but imbedded dynamics that define perpetuation, physically, intellectually, and conceptually. This is markedly different than, and yields a richer, more complex result than perpetuation by cloning or fission, which would allow for only sameness. Torah's prescription for its own perpetuation: *vishinantam li'baneycha*, "you shall teach your children" is a case in point. As such, the wisdom of Spiritual Physics developed and revealed by Harchol in dialogues between parents and child is Torah in both content and dynamic.

Torah and Rabbinic teachings throughout the generations and across traditions and genres provide us with an abundance of wisdom of Spiritual Physics. They are the ideas from which Torah as "the way" and "the guide" evolve and unfold. It is not necessarily the "right way," implying morality, or the "fair way," implying justice, but the way of reality by which life happens.



Many such teachings are depicted in Harchol's animations: that life is bitter and you must eat the bitterness and not let it eat you; that love is about giving; that refusing to forgive perpetuates your pain but brings no real solace; that gratitude and appreciating your present circumstance enables fulfillment and satisfaction; that a single characteristic, like envy, can yield both negative and positive outcomes, be both destroyer and preserver, and you control how to use it.

A specific example of Spiritual Physics parallels Newton's 3rd law: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." The Talmudic phrase for this concept, absent Newton's arithmetic, is *yridah she'hi l'tzorech aliyah*, "a decline/descent for the purpose of ascent." It describes the backwards swinging motion of an ax over our shoulders for the purpose of a powerful forward chop. The back motion of the ax is never purposefully conclusive but is a necessary component of the desired movement, which is to bring the ax forward with power. A more popular example is pulling backwards on the slingshot to enable forward propulsion. The Spiritual Physics of *yridah she'hi l'tzorech aliyah*, also accommodates the dynamics of *Teshuva*, which translates as repentance, return, response, and answer, and describes the role of failure in birthing success, and brokenness in creating wholeness. Harchol, in his "Repair" animation, alludes to *Beraishis Raba* – section 4, where Rabbi Ahavah the son of Rabbi Zeirah articulates the opinion that *Teshuva*, inter alia, was created before the world.

Primordial *Teshuva* as a foundational construct for God's new world suggests that imperfection, failure, the rupturing of relationships, and living with questions (*yridah*), are built in as elements of the forthcoming and ongoing creative process. Primordial *Teshuva* needs to precede the forthcoming creation because the natural process of actualizing bold ideas in God's



**You Can Dance**, 2012, (Animated Still)

created world (*aliyah*) will be imperfect, requiring incubation, experimentation, error, reversals, and implementational stumbling. *Teshuva*, as *yridah she'hi l'tzorech aliyah*, results in growth through the hard won lessons of failure.

Counter-intuitively, Chassidic masters therefore respected the energy of sin as being the necessary precursor for the movement, through *Teshuva*, toward *Mitzvah* and ultimately, redemption. "Darkness is the throne upon which the light sits" (Rabbi Aharon of Apt). As such, *Teshuva* is more than a reparative function that recalibrates a relationship otherwise defined by status. Rather, *Teshuva* is the essential dynamic that defines the relationship itself, in all its fluidity. To be in relationship is to be in orchestrated movement. How parties adjust and correct missteps, how they exercise *Teshuva* vis-a-vis one another, is the stuff of the relationship. Aristotle theorized in *Physics* that nature contains no vacuums because the surrounding material continuum moves to immediately fill any incipient void. Idiomatically, "nature abhors a vacuum." Conversely, there can be no receipt without having space or making the space for it. In physics, as in Spiritual Physics, if one has emptiness there is a need to fill it. If there is fullness, one must first give, to create the capacity to receive anew and enable the movement that delivers into the vacuum. The entirety of the process moves us from unstable (empty, *yridah*) to stable (full / complete, *aliyah*).

Similarly, two active steps toward *Teshuva* (qua repentance or return), as described by Maimonides, include remorse for the past and acceptance for the future. Remorse disgorges and creates capacity (empty). Acceptance refills the capacity with rich possibilities (full / complete). (*Teshuva* as "answer" also fills a vacuum, the intellectual vacuum created by a question).

This physics of vacuum also applies to creating a love

relationship. Giving of ourselves creates for us an emotional vacuum, and a moment of instability, but it is the only way to create capacity and energy to receive in return from others. Giving is the *yridah* (the "action" in Newton's terms). The *aliyah* ("reaction") is the corresponding act of receiving from the other party in the relationship. The vacuum cycle in the love relationship is completed and stabilized when the other party in the relationship also gives and receives. As stated above, to be in relationship is to be in orchestrated movement; that is, to be engaged in the Spiritual Physics of giving and receiving as defined by vacuums and, action and reaction.

Harchol's Love animation points out that the root of the Hebrew word *ahavah*, love, is *hav*, to give. In Spiritual Physics, giving is the currency of love, as it is also the currency of *Teshuva*. Thus, relationships can be measured by every party's willingness to give to one another. What enables one to give first and expose oneself, is the personality trait of humility. Love and *Teshuva* each have a personality nurtured by humility; the willingness to shed one's own ego and encounter vulnerability (*yridah* / "action"), for the hope of receiving reciprocity which would further the relationship itself (*aliyah* / "reaction").

Life can be complex, but at its core there is a one-ness, an *echod* that undergirds both the physics and Spiritual Physics of how things work. Much is to be learnt from Torah, Rabbinic teachings, and generations of Jewish life experience, to make our life's journey more meaningful, accomplished, and satisfying. Hanan Harchol's dialogues accomplish that, as they take their place within the universe of Jewish wisdom, his animations furthering the possibilities of art as text. ■

*Joe Septimus*

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# Adding Benches to the Study Hall

Rabbi Leon Morris

There is an intriguing story in the Babylonian Talmud about the ousting and succession of the man who held the highest rabbinic position in the land of Israel, the *Nasi*, or head of the Sanhedrin, the Great Assembly of the Jewish people. Rabban Gamliel, seen as overly authoritative, uncompromising, and insufficiently sensitive to his colleagues, is forced out of office. In Rabban Gamliel's place they appoint an 18-year old scholar named Rabbi Eleazar Ben Azaria. The most fascinating feature of this Talmudic story is not just the particular change in the personality of these leaders, but rather a change in style that these leaders embodied.

תנא אותו היום סלקוהו לשומר הפתח ונתנה להם רשות לתלמידים ליכנס. שהיה רבן גמליאל מכריז ואומר: כל תלמיד שאין תוכו כברו - לא יכנס לבית המדרש. ההוא יומא אתוספו כמה ספסלי. אמר רבי יוחנן: פליגי בה אבא יוסף בן דוסתאי ורבנן, חד אמר: אתוספו ארבע מאה ספסלי וחד אמר: שבע מאה ספסלי.

It was taught: On that day [that they removed Rabban Gamliel from his position and appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in his place, there was also a fundamental change in the general approach of the study hall] as they dismissed the guard at the door and permission was granted to the students to enter. [Instead of Rabban Gamliel's selective approach that asserted that the students must be screened before accepting them into the study hall, the new approach asserted that anyone who seeks to study should be given opportunity to do so.] As Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside, his thoughts and feelings, are not like his outside, i.e., his conduct and his character traits are lacking, will not enter the study hall. The Gemara relates: On that day several benches were added to the study hall to accommodate the numerous students. Rabbi Yochanan said: Abba Yosef ben Dostai and the Rabbis disputed this matter. One said: Four hundred benches were added to the study hall. And one said: Seven hundred benches were added to the study hall (Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 28a, translation from Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *Koren Talmud Bavli*).

On the face of it, Rabban Gamliel's criteria for entering the *beit midrash* (study hall) might seem like a justified, and even wise standard of admissions. The *beit midrash* seeks out students who have integrity, are honest, and without pretenses of being something they are not. That personality combined with the serious study of Jewish texts might indeed lead to a character development that successfully integrates the values gleaned from the texts themselves. But who knows what is truly in another's heart? Who can predetermine how Torah study might shape an individual and contribute to his or her evolving personality and sense of self? If Rabban Gamliel is representative of the high bar approach to learning, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria brings with him a diametrically opposed point of view. He eliminates the bouncer, opens wide the gates, and allows everyone who desires to come and learn.

Teshuvah, 2013, (detail), 10 inches x 5 inches, ink on paper



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Accessibility, of course, is a relevant theme both in the world of Torah and art. For the Talmudic Rabbis, the question was who may enter the world of Jewish study? Might it be wise to establish as prerequisites a certain background and a particular personality? But the approach of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria embodied in Hanan's work is one that maintains that by opening up the world of study to everyone, far more will be gained than what might be lost. Of course, there is a risk that, outside of a traditional environment of learning, these texts may not be treated with sufficient reverence. Artists in particular raise the fears of religious authorities that boundaries will be transgressed. Ultimately, however, the approach of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria demonstrates how both the individual and the system benefit from this openness. Individuals are given the opportunity to expand their minds and their hearts, to acquire new forms of expression, to pursue wisdom, to enhance their lives, and to strengthen their connection to God and to one another. At the same time, the classic texts pored over by a more diverse population allows those texts to speak in new ways. More benches in the study hall means more commentary, more *chidushim* (insights), and ultimately an expansion and enhancement of Torah. Artists like Hanan who are actively engaged in creating new commentaries on our people's most ancient texts, demonstrate the continued relevance these texts have to our contemporary lives and the unlimited (and often untapped) creative potential that exists within them.

The dispute over the exact numbers of benches added (was it 400 or 700?) suggests that this *beit midrash* can accommodate an almost infinite number of seats. Once it is opened up, there is a place for everyone. Likewise, Hanan Harchol's work reflects an opening of the *beit midrash* to all who wish to enter. It does so in two ways.

First, Harchol's own experience of having had a *beit midrash* open to him was the catalyst for this entire body of work. Together with a group of filmmakers and video artists gathering once a month at the Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning to study the Haggadah, Harchol entered into the language of Jewish thought and liturgy. Like so many others before him, Hanan found there a language that spoke to his soul and could be expressed through his art. He produced a powerfully understated animated film elucidating the deeper meaning behind *maror*, the bitter herb whose consumption is central to the Passover Seder. That film, as would be the case for others he would later create in this genre, artfully combined humor

and depth, lightness and darkness. Presented as a dialogue between himself and his father, what revealed itself was an internal dialogue of the artist and perhaps of each of us.

Next, through his work, Hanan himself becomes a sort of Eleazar ben Azaria for others – inviting them to join him in his unfolding *beit midrash* of moving images and compelling dialogue. His animated films have the effect of removing the guard at the door and granting permission for all to enter into deep and rich conversations on love and fear, on forgiveness, and on gratitude.

The appointment of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria also represented a more general openness toward dissent and an embrace of the exchange of ideas. Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria are emblematic of two distinct modes of conversation. For Rabban Gamliel in this passage, the job of leadership to squash dissent. Earlier in the story, the unkind response of Rabban Gamliel toward Rabbi Joshua, with whom he disagrees, serves as the catalyst for Rabban Gamliel's push from power. For Eleazar ben Azaria, the demand of the people that alternative views be respected and listened to is what created the moment that allowed for his ascendancy to power.

While Rabban Gamliel's criteria for admission was inappropriately exclusive –that one's inside needed to match one's outside – it nonetheless does seem to be an apt description of the artist whose work we celebrate in this catalogue, Hanan Harchol. The external effect of his visual work and its accompanying writing is reflective of internal values that ground his character and his work. Harchol's passion for his art, his sensitivity to the human condition, his openness to being moved and transformed by Jewish teachings, and his search for wisdom and insight, all come from the deepest core of his being. I feel truly privileged to have had an opportunity to work together, and for the *beit midrash* experience we shared to have launched him on this path.

The origin of this project of Harchol's is the Haggadah, as mentioned above. Perhaps the most well-known mention of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azaria is from the Mishnah (Berachot 1:5), recalling the young age at which he assumed his position. It is cited, in part, in the Haggadah's narrative section where Eleazar ben Azaria stated, "I am like a man of seventy...."

אָמַר רַבִּי אֱלֶעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה, הָרִי אֲנִי כְּבֶן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה...

The commentary suggests that upon his appointment as the head of the Sanhedrin, this 18-year-old suddenly becomes *like* a man of seventy. His beard became long and grey. His outside came to reflect his inside, in a kind of ironic inverse manifestation of his predecessor's unrealistic standard. Harchol's art reveals a wisdom beyond his years. The dialogue he has written between himself and his parents allows him to be simultaneously both young and "like a man of seventy." The animations themselves are both naïve and starkly complex, creating a body of work that seems simultaneously youthful and aged. ■

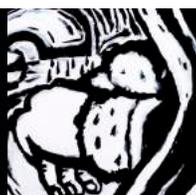
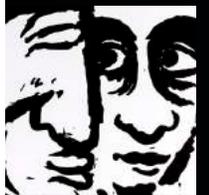
*Rabbi Leon A. Morris*

# THEMES



## Jewish Food For Thought Themes:

Repentance	תְּשׁוּבָה
Forgiveness	סְלִיחָה
Gratitude	הַפְּרַת הַטּוֹב
Love & Fear	אַהֲבָה וְיִרְאָה
Envy	קִנְיָאָה
Humility	עֲנָוָה
Faith	אֱמוּנָה





MISTAKES ARE GOOD?!?

MISTAKES ARE THE KEY TO REPAIR!



HOW??



IN ORDER TO CHANGE YOURSELF, YOU FIRST HAVE TO GET TO KNOW YOURSELF...ESPECIALLY THE HIDDEN PARTS! AND YOU ONLY BECOME AWARE OF YOUR HIDDEN PARTS THROUGH YOUR MISTAKES! THE PURPOSE OF MISTAKES, IS TO HELP US REALLY SEE OURSELVES!

BUT DADDY, IF WE'RE NOT ABLE TO FIX THE MISTAKE, THEN WHAT ARE WE ULTIMATELY REPAIRING?!?



WELL, THAT'S SIMPLE: WE'RE REPAIRING OURSELVES AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PEOPLE...THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL REALLY ABOUT...SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT THE REASON WE'RE NOT PERFECT IS SPECIFICALLY SO WE CAN GO THROUGH THE PROCESS OF REPAIR! THERE'S EVEN A SAYING THAT REPAIR WAS CREATED BEFORE THE WORLD WAS CREATED!

# Repentance

## תְּשׁוּבָה

( to return )

The gates of repentance are always open and anyone who wishes to enter may enter.

השערים נפתחים בכל שעה, וכל מי שהוא מבקש ליכנס יכנס.

– Exodus Rabbah 19:4

• • • • •

Repentance also comprises the notion that man has a measure of control over his existence in all dimensions, including time. Time flows in one direction; it is impossible to undo or even to alter an action after it has occurred and become an “event,” an objective fact. However, even though the past is “fixed,” repentance admits of an ascendancy over it, of the possibility of changing its significance in the context of the present and future. This is why repentance has been presented as something created before the world itself. In a world of inexorable flow of time, in which all objects and events are interconnected in a relationship of cause and effect, repentance is the exception: it is the potential for something else.

– R. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Thirteen Petalled Rose*, p. 93-94

• • • • •

Whenever a person rises from one level to the next, it necessitates that he first has a descent before the ascent. Because the purpose of any descent is always in order to ascend.

אך כשרוצים לצאת ממדרגה...למדרגה גבוה ממנה, צריך להיות ירידה קדם העליה, כי הירידה היא תכלית העליה.

– Likutey Moharan 22:11

• • • • •

Sins are the essence of melancholy. When the soul undergoes cleansing, it experiences the very essence of its sin, and then does the melancholy of penitence asserts itself; a fire of anguish, remorse, shame and a terrifying fear burns inside it. But in this very process it is purified. So that it can afterward return to its state of strength and self-respect.

Sometime, precisely as a person entertains the thought of repentance, he feels agitated with a deep sense of anxiety because of his low state of perfection and his grave deterioration. It is, however, precisely then for him to consider that this awareness and this anxiety are the best signs assuring him of eternal deliverance through the perfection of the self and he should strengthen himself...

העונות הם עצם היגון, וכשהנשמה מטהרת היא מרגשת את העצמיות של העונות ואז היגון של התשובה מתגבר עליה, ובעור בקרבה אש הצער של החרטה והבושה והפחד האיום, ובוה עצמו היא מזדככת, ותוכל... לשוב לאיתנה להיות עומדת בחסנה ובכבודה העצמי.

כשעולה על לבו של אדם לשוב בתשובה שלמה... לבו דואג בקרבו בהרדה גדולה על מעוט שלמותו ועומק נפילתו. אבל דוקא אז ישים אל לבו, שראיה זו והראגה הבאה עמה הנה הן הסמנים היותר טובים המבשרים לו ישועת עולמים בתקון הנפש, ויתחזק מאד בזה ...

– Rav Kook, *The Light of Repentance*, 8:11-12, 16

When is the last time you genuinely apologized to someone for something you did? What makes an apology worthwhile? What steps do people need to take in order for an apology to be sincere? Do you think Judaism’s “opinion” will agree with yours?



### Important note from the author and animator Hanan Harchol:

The Hebrew word for repair is *tikkun* (תיקון). And yet the four-step process I am describing in this story is actually that of *teshuvah* (תשובה) which is literally translated “to return” (to God) and is commonly translated as *repentance*. Why, then, did I not title the story “Repentance” and use the word *repentance* throughout? The reason was my personal feeling that the word *repentance* could be interpreted by some to have a judgmental, preachy tone, and might carry so much negative connotation that the viewer would possibly focus on the term rather than the concept itself. The essence behind *teshuvah* (as I understand it) is the process of fixing one’s relationship with other people and one’s relationship with God (to return to God). This Jewish teaching says that no matter how egregious the wrongdoing, one can always perform *teshuvah*. Further it states that the reason we are not perfect is specifically so we can then choose whether or not to go through the difficult, but nourishing, process of *teshuvah*. When trying to come up with a less preachy word that still embodies the essence of this process, I chose to use “repair.”

Repairing a broken relationship or trust takes work, commitment, and a desire to do what you can to fix what has been broken. “Repair” (*teshuvah*) is encouraged throughout Jewish teaching; in fact, it is required in most cases when people make mistakes. Judaism’s take is that repairing a mistake or apologizing for behavior is always an option, no matter the situation. The responsibility lies in your hands; the work of repair requires effort but is not impossible and has a value in and of itself.

## ① Repair: Maimonides’ Four Steps

The most famous laws about repair come to us from the 12th century rabbi, philosopher, and physician Maimonides (1135-1204, Spain), or Rambam, one of the greatest Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. Maimonides wrote codes of law for the Jewish community, clarifying common Jewish practice and accepted standards of observance. He wrote for the simple “Jew on the street” as much as for scholars, and his codes have remained relevant across the spectrum of Jewish belief until today.

According to Maimonides, four of the most important steps of *teshuvah* are the following:

1. Verbally confess your mistake and ask for forgiveness (*Mishneh Torah 1:1*).
2. Express sincere remorse, resolving not to make the same mistake again (*Mishneh Torah 2:2*).
3. Do everything in your power to “right the wrong,” to appease the person who has been hurt (*Mishneh Torah 2:9*).
4. Act differently if the same situation happens again (*Mishneh Torah 2:1*).

The fourth concept originates in the Talmud:

How is one to tell whether a penitent is genuine? Rabbi Judah said: When the penitent has the opportunity to commit the same sin once and once again and he refrains from committing it.

*Yoma 86b*

1. Hanan’s father is confused by the actions of his friend. He doesn’t judge him for the *mistake*, but does seem to judge him for his *response* to the mistake. He desperately wants Shlomo to have tried to enact some level of *teshuvah*. Is this a realistic expectation?
2. Hanan initially believed *teshuvah* would be essentially impossible because Shlomo would never be able to repay the money lost. According to his father, however, money was the least of the issues. The recognition, confession, and attempt to reimburse were far more important. With whom do you agree and why? Do you see a value in completing some of the steps but not all of them?
3. Shlomo had the chance to change his actions with every new deal he brokered, yet he didn’t. If someone repeatedly makes the same mistake, how does that affect the nature of an apology?

Watch all episodes at [www.JewishFoodForThought.com](http://www.JewishFoodForThought.com)

## ② The Process of Repair

Judaism argues that there is always room for *teshuvah*. An early Jewish text, *Exodus Rabbah*, teaches:

The gates of repentance are always open, and anyone who wishes to enter may enter.

*Exodus Rabbah, 19:4*

A similar message is taught in *Lamentations Rabbah*:

...Prayer is likened to an immersion pool, but repentance is likened to the sea. Just as an immersion pool is at times open and at other times locked, so the gates of prayer are at times open and at other times locked. But the sea is always open, even as the gates of repentance are always open.

*Lamentations Rabbah 3:43, section 9*

1. Why does Judaism set up such a permissive standard? Why doesn't Judaism require the ideal behavior from the outset?
2. Does Judaism emphasize the act of *teshuvah* for the good of the person doing it or for the person who was wronged?
3. People often immerse themselves in guilt as a substitute for choosing to go through the difficult process of doing *teshuvah*. Both Judaism and Hanan's father take away the "guilt" aspect of repair, instead focusing on the *opportunity* which the process of *teshuvah* provides us to be human, make mistakes, and learn from them. How does this framing feel? Is there any value to the "guilt" you feel when you do something you wish you hadn't?
4. If the process of *teshuvah* is never-ending, always allowing for mistakes to be made and corrected, how do you avoid becoming lazy about your actions? Why try to be the best friend, partner, child, parent, etc., you can be if there is always room to apologize when you fall short?

Along with laws about repair, Maimonides also teaches that the recipient of an apology should be open to offering forgiveness and receiving the apology.

...When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.

*Mishneh Torah 2:10*

5. Hanan's father did not invest in the pyramid scheme. If he had, do you think he would have been as gracious about what he hoped for Shlomo?

6. Are you as forgiving with people when there is a financial mistake made as you are with an ethical mistake?

Hanan Harchol, the author and animator believes that the most important exchange in the script is between Hanan and his father when he asks:

**HANAN:** ...if we're *not* able to fix the *mistake*, then *what* are we ultimately *repairing*?!?

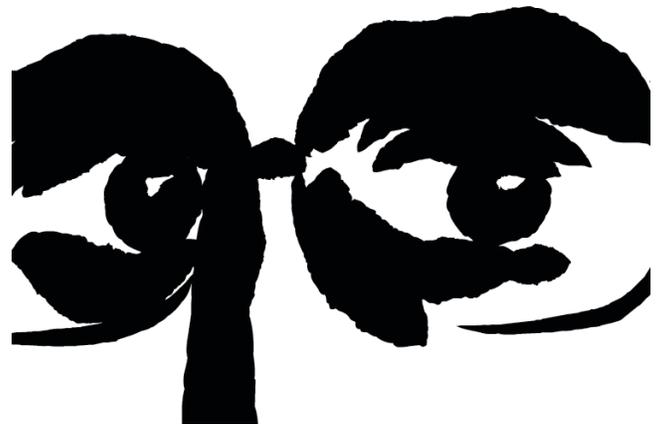
His father answers:

**DADDY:** Well, that's simple: we're repairing *ourselves* and our *relationships* with *other people*....That's what it's all *really* about...

7. His father is speaking about repair, but what is the deeper meaning he implies? What is the most compelling line to you?
8. What does Hanan's father mean when he says the following?

**DADDY:** Even someone who has committed an unforgivable crime has the opportunity to go through the process of repair.

According to Jewish law, murder is unforgivable because the person is unable to give forgiveness. How could a person do *teshuvah* for an unforgivable crime?



THEMES: REPENTANCE

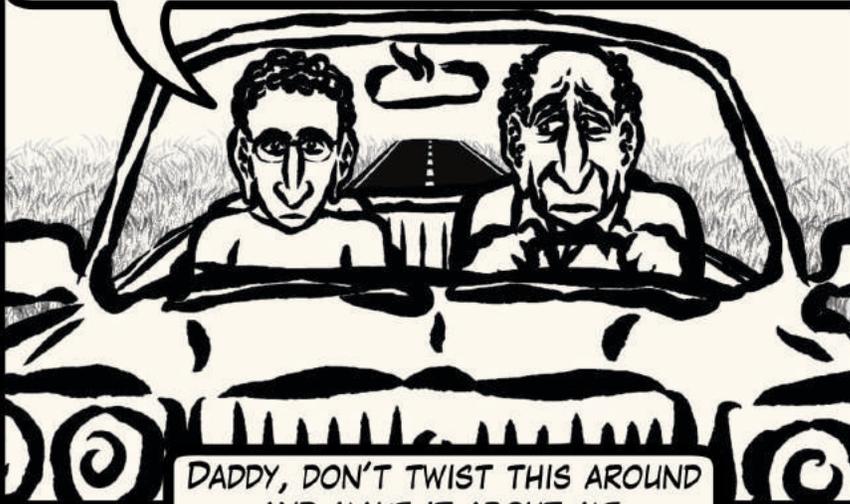


Top: **Installation of drawings**, 2013, Apx. 6 feet x 6 feet, ink on paper

Right: **Teshuvah**, 2013, 6 feet x 5 feet, acrylic on canvas



THE LAST THING I'M GOING TO DO IS TO FORGIVE HIM!



DADDY, DON'T TWIST THIS AROUND AND MAKE IT ABOUT ME.

THAT'S YOUR CHOICE! BUT REMEMBER THAT SOMEDAY WHEN YOU'RE ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS WHETHER YOU WANT TO BE JUDGED THE WAY YOU'RE JUDGING HIM.



WHO ELSE IS IT ABOUT?



WELL HIM OBVIOUSLY...WHAT HE DID!



...I JUST HOPE HE'S PAYING YOU THE RENT.

PAYING ME???  
HE STOLE FROM ME!  
WHAT RENT?!?  
WHAT ARE YOU  
TALKING ABOUT?



I'M TALKING ABOUT THE FACT THAT HE'S LIVING INSIDE YOUR HEAD!! HE'S OBVIOUSLY TAKING UP A LOT OF ROOM THERE! I MEAN, WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN, TWO YEARS AGO? AND YOU'RE STILL TALKING ABOUT HIM?! SO... HOW MUCH IS HE PAYING YOU?



# Forgiveness

## סְלִיחָה

The world is a mirror; faults you see in others are your own.

–Ba'al Shem Tov

• • • • •

Anger dwells in the bosom of fools.

כִּי כַעַס בְּחִיק בְּסִלִּים יָגוּחַ.

– Ecclesiastes 7:9

• • • • •

A bad tempered person gains nothing but the ill effects of anger; a good tempered person is fed with the fruit of the deeds.

רְגוֹן לֹא עֵלְתָה בִּידוֹ אֲלֵא רְגוֹנוֹתָא וּלְאִדָּם טוֹב מִמַּעֲיָמִים אוֹתוֹ מִפְּרֵי מַעֲשָׂיו.

– Kiddushin 40b-41a

• • • • •

When the person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.

וּבִשְׁעָה שֶׁמִּבְקֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ הַחוֹטֵא לְמַחֹל מוֹחֵל בְּלֵב שְׁלֵם וּבִנְפֶשׁ חַפְּצָה וְאִפְּלוּ הָצַר לוֹ וְחַטָּא לוֹ הִרְבֵּה לֹא יִקוּם וְלֹא יִטוֹר.

– Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:10

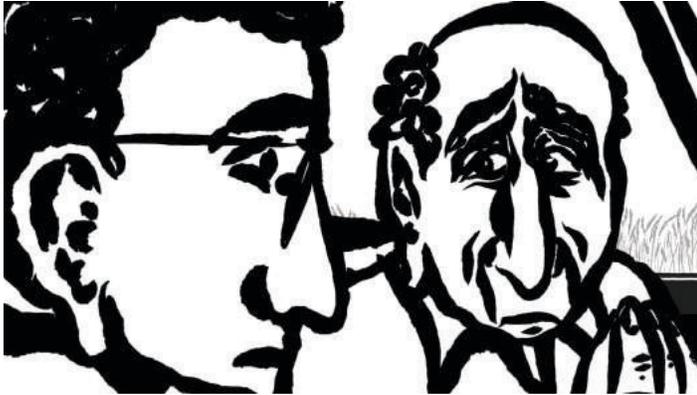
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On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Torah, the rest is the commentary; go and learn it.'

שׁוֹב מַעֲשֵׂה בְּנֹכְרֵי אֶחָד שֶׁבָּא לִפְנֵי שַׁמַּאי אָמַר לוֹ גִּיירֵנִי עִימָ שְׁתִּלְמַדְנִי כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כּוֹלָה כִּשְׁאֲנִי עוֹמֵד עַל רֶגֶל אַחַת דַּחְפוּ בְּאֵמַת הַבְּנִין שְׁבִידוֹ בֹּא לִפְנֵי הִלֵּל גִּיירֵיהָ אָמַר לוֹ דַּעֲלֵךְ סָנִי לְחִבְרֵךְ לֹא תַעֲבִיד זֶה הִיא כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כּוֹלָה וְאִידֶךָ פִּירוּשָׁה הוּא זֵיל גְּמוּר.

– Shabbat 31a

Why would you want to forgive someone who has wronged you? Is there any benefit to forgiving? Is there a “right” time to forgive? And what does religion have to do with it? Come to think of it, does religion have *anything* to do with it?



Thousands of years of Jewish text and wisdom offer us tremendous strategies for, and potential solutions to, the tricky business of forgiveness. In Jewish teaching, people are encouraged to lean toward compassion and forgiveness and to offer opportunities for others to engage in *teshuvah* (תשובה), traditionally defined as repentance. But the teaching is not necessarily easy to implement in real life. So, what is the essence of what Judaism teaches? Is there anything to be gained from forgiving in even the most difficult situations? What can be gleaned from Jewish sources about the value of following that path?

Hanan Harchol (the author and animator of the film) and his father argue about the value of accepting David’s apology, revealing **three ways** to think about forgiveness. Essentially, according to Hanan’s father, forgiveness is all about choice.

1. Recognizing forgiveness as a free choice that reflects who you want to be: how you choose to behave and how you choose to treat other people (independent of their behavior toward you).
2. Seeing forgiveness as a choice about how to handle your anger and how long to hold onto anger.
3. Choosing to think about the situation from the perspective of the wrongdoer – allowing empathy to help direct your response.

Jewish text offers guidance in these three realms. However, looking at the texts in the light of an actual scenario in which forgiveness may be necessary encourages thoughtful deliberation about what you might do and what ideas influence your opinion.

### ① Who Do You Want to Be?

In any argument you probably believe that you are correct. While you may be able to see the other person’s perspective, there is a point at which you draw a line in the sand, deciding who is “right” and who is “wrong.” In the film, Hanan’s father encourages him to recognize that only he can decide whether or not to forgive David. With the apology imminent, Hanan needs to work through the resentment he still feels. His father points out the revenge he is trying to exact and questions its benefit. Imparting a similar message, the Talmud teaches:

A bad tempered person gains nothing but the ill effects of anger; a good tempered person is fed with the fruit of the deeds.

*Kiddushin, 40b – 41a*

1. Does it really matter *why* David is apologizing? Should Hanan care whether or not David has “learned a lesson” or should he be more focused on how the anger has affected him?
2. What does it mean to make *active decisions* about the nature of forgiveness and anger?
3. In your own life, should your responses be based on someone else’s intent?
4. Do you agree with the quote from *Kiddushin* above, or do you believe there is some qualitative use for anger? Was there for Hanan?

Hanan Harchol believes that the most important and difficult line in the script is:

**DADDY:** Actions lead to feelings.

Hanan’s father goes on to say:

**DADDY:** Stopping an action is not the same as taking an action. To free yourself from the resentment, you need to take action.

5. What does “actions lead to feelings” mean? Can a feeling “grow” as a result of an action? Do you agree that there is a difference between stopping an action and taking one? Can you think of times in your life when stopping an action actually was an active choice? Is there something in-between? Do actions lead to feelings or is it the other way around? Which should be the driving force?

The Ba’al Shem Tov (18th century, Poland), a rabbi and the founder of Chasidism, taught:

The world is a mirror; the faults you see in others are your own.

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6. What are the most difficult behaviors to change in yourself? When have you most keenly seen those behaviors in others? With which parts of the Ba'al Shem Tov's statement do you agree and with which parts do you disagree?

## ② How Long to Hold On to Anger?

Compared to other emotions and responses, there is a surprising lack of discussion in Jewish sources regarding how to *handle* anger. Some texts advise that you should be slow to anger, but all agree that it is within human nature to be angry, often referring to Moses and his bouts with anger to justify our own modern experiences. There is, however, a leaning toward tempering your frustrations, allowing your **יצר הטוב** - inclination toward good (*yetzer ha tov*) to overpower your **יצר הרע** - inclination toward bad (*yetzer ha ra*). The Talmudic rabbis emphasized this idea in the following teaching:

One who tears up his garments in his fury, or breaks his vessels in anger, or who scatters his money in his rage, let him be in your eyes as like an idolater, for such is the way of the evil inclination: today it says to him, 'Do this,' tomorrow it tells him, 'Do this,' until it bids him, 'Go and serve idols,' and he goes and serves them.

*Shabbat 105b*

1. David writes to Hanan after two years, during which time Hanan has let his anger grow. How did the amount of time that passed affect Hanan's response to David's request to meet? Is there a time limit on forgiveness?
2. What has happened to Hanan's anger in the time since the event occurred? Does it even matter that David took two years to be in touch?
3. Is Hanan's anger a result of what he perceives he lost or what he believes about David's choice?
4. Had David actually *given* the reference, but still been offered the job, what do you think Hanan's reaction would have been?

A biblical quote goes even further:

Anger dwells in the bosom of fools.

*Ecclesiastes 7:9*

5. In what ways did Hanan's father prove to him that the extent of his anger was foolish?

## ③ What About "the Other Guy?"

In one of the most famous Jewish tales of morality, Rabbi Hillel (110 BCE – 10 CE), a Talmudic scholar, encapsulates the entire idea of Judaism in one sentence, encouraging us to give as much thought to others' perspective as to our own:

On another occasion it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, the rest is the commentary; go and learn it.'

*Shabbat 31a*

1. Hillel teaches, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." Hanan's response to David's act is righteous indignation. However, Hanan later reveals that he wishes he had made some different choices in his life. How difficult is it to monitor your own behavior when your choices affect others?
2. Hanan and his father initially disagree about whether or not Hanan should forgive David. Do you think Hanan believes that he could ever have done what David did? What might have encouraged Hanan to be more inclined to accept the apology?

Rabbi Brad Hirschfield puts this situation into context when he offers the following about forgiveness:

The number of apologies you seek should be proportional to the number you are willing to offer, because the doing of each nurtures the capacity for the other.

Brad Hirschfield, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Judaism/2009/09/How-to-Forgive-and-Receive-Forgiveness.aspx?ρ=4#ixzz1STO9JIAM>

3. What are the differences between being able to offer a difficult apology, seeking a difficult apology, and accepting one? Which is most challenging for you?
4. What decision in your life do you think had the most consequential result for someone else? For the better, or for the worse?



Top: **Installation Shot of Hanan Harchol: Jewish Food For Thought**  
*(View from inside Great Petrie Hall)*  
2013, 6 feet x 5 feet (each), acrylic on canvas



THE WAY TO HAVE MORE THAN ENOUGH,...



WELL OBVIOUSLY YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE, TZZZ, EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT HANAN!...

...BUT BEING GRATEFUL DOESN'T CHANGE THE REALITY THAT HIS HOUSE IS **SMALL!**



IS TO BE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE.



THE REALITY IS THAT HIS HOUSE **IS** WHAT IT IS!  
BUT BY BEING STUCK ON WHAT HE WANTS, HE ISN'T ABLE TO BENEFIT FROM THE HOUSE HE **ALREADY HAS!**...  
I WOULD ARGUE THAT BEING GRATEFUL IS THE ONLY WAY TO ACTUALLY GET ANY BENEFIT OUT OF LIFE AT ALL - I'M TALKING ABOUT ACTUALLY STOPPING AND RECOGNIZING - **SEEING** - WHAT YOU HAVE.  
UNTIL HE IS GRATEFUL,...HE IS...



**HOMELESS!**



# Gratitude

## הַכֶּרֶת הַטוֹב

Who is rich? Those who rejoice in their own portion.

איזהו עשיר השמחה בחלקו.

– Pirkei Avot 4:1

• • • • •

A person with complete understanding knows that time in this world is really nothing. The sensation of time stems from deficient understanding. The greater one's understanding, the more one sees and understands that in reality, time does not exist.

We can actually feel how time flies like a passing shadow and a cloud that will soon disappear. If you take this to heart you will be free of worries about mundane matters and you will have the strength and determination to snatch what you can – a good deed here, a lesson there – in order to gain something that is truly enduring out of this life. You will gain the life of the eternal world, which is completely beyond time.

You must make sure you set aside a time each day when you can reflect calmly on everything you are doing and the way you are behaving and ask if this is the right way to spend your days.

מי שיש לו דעת שלם הוא יודע, שכל הזמן של העולם אינו כלום, כי עקר הזמן הוא מחסרון הדעת. אבל כל מה שהשכל נתגדל יותר, הוא רואה ומבין בטול הזמן ביותר... וגם בחוש רואין פריחת הזמן מאד מאד כצל עובר ממש ובענן כלה וכו'. ואם תשים לב לזה תנצל מדאגות עולם הזה הרבה ותתחזק הרבה לחטף בכל פעם כל מה שתוכל, שיצליחך לנצח ששם הוא למעלה מהזמן לגמרי כי הוא עולם הנצחי.

על כן צריכין להתגבר מאד לראות לישוב עצמו היטב על כל מעשיו והנהגותיו. אם כך ראוי לו לבלות ימיו במעשים כאלו.

– Likutey Etzot, Wisdom: 50, 54

• • • • •

So he went to him [R. Joshua b. Levi went, on the instructions of Elijah the prophet, to meet the Messiah who was residing at the gates of Rome]....He asked: 'When will you come, Master?,' 'Today,' he [the Messiah] answered. On his [R. Joshua b. Levi] return to Elijah, Elijah inquired, 'What did he say to you?' —'Peace upon you, O son of Levi,' he [R. Joshua b. Levi] answered. Elijah observed, 'He thereby assured you and your father of [a portion in] the world to come.' 'He spoke falsely to me,' he [R. Joshua b. Levi] rejoined, 'stating that he would come today, but has not.' He [Elijah] answered him, 'This is what the Messiah said to you, "Today, if you will hear His voice" (Ps. 95:7).'

אזל לגביה [ר'] יהושע בן לוי הלך – בעצתו של אליהו הנביא – אל המשיח, שיושב בשערי רומי] ... אמר ליה: לאימת אתי מר? – אמר ליה: היום. אתא לגבי אליהו. – אמר ליה: מאי אמר לך? – אמר ליה: שלום עליך בר ליואי. – אמר ליה: אבטחך לך ולאבוך לעלמא דאתי. – אמר ליה: שקורי קא שקר בי, דאמר לי היום אתינא, ולא אתא! – אמר ליה: הכי אמר לך היום – אם בקלו תשמעו. (תהילים צה, ז) "היום אם בקולו תשמעו".

– Sanhedrin 98a

What is the relationship between gratitude and happiness? Why is gratitude so important? And, what does religion have to say about it? Does Judaism say anything unexpected?

Although Judaism has endured its share of challenges as a religion, culture, and community, its traditions and teachings emphatically promote gratitude. It is too easy, Jewish sources say, to fall back on the simple route of being dissatisfied with life and focusing on what you lack. True gratitude requires an honest accounting of what you do have, an accounting of which, Judaism argues, will allow you to acknowledge the blessings which are a part of your life. Woven into thousands of years of Jewish thought is the overriding idea that taking time to recognize what you have in life is one of the uniquely beneficial rituals we can undertake.

As this episode begins, Hanan and his father each approach the very human experience of comparing what one has to what others have, but they do so from two very different places. Hanan’s father can’t seem to see beyond his feelings of envy, while Hanan tells his father over and over again to “be grateful.” Gratitude, Hanan tries to explain, can offer more than his father might think.

First, Hanan says, gratitude will enable his father to not only have enough, but to have more than enough. Second, being grateful will force his father to stay in the reality of the present moment and benefit from the actual experience of life instead of living in the “reality of expectations.” And, third, Hanan points out there is a connection between humility and being grateful.

### ① Being Grateful – How to Have Not Just Enough, but More Than Enough

Hanan begins his conversation with his dad by referring to a classic Jewish folktale. The “goat story” is his first attempt to help his father take stock of what he actually has instead of what he thinks he lacks. By doing so, his father might find he is more than satisfied with his current situation.

Hanan’s telling of this story echoes ideas in classic Jewish teaching. One of the most recognized and quoted texts in Jewish thought is *Pirkei Avot*. Full of aphorisms that teach about the potential for living a more fulfilled life, *Pirkei Avot*, written around the year 200 CE, offers the following:

Who is rich? Those who rejoice in their own portion  
*Pirkei Avot 4:1*

1. While this is a seemingly simple statement, what is the deeper meaning behind it? Do you find that it is difficult to be grateful for what you have? What would make it easier to acknowledge the good things in your life?

2. How realistic is it to always be grateful for the good things in your life? What gets in the way of gratitude?
3. How do you acknowledge the things you value in your life, and how often?
4. Do you often think about the things you lack rather than acknowledging the things you do have?
5. Is there a difference between simply recognizing what you have and being grateful for what you have? If so, what is the nature of the difference?
6. It is easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself to others. How can being grateful help establish a sense of not only having enough, but having more than enough?
7. What are the benefits of acknowledging the good things in your life more frequently?
8. Are you more like Hanan or his father in relating to the goat story? Who responds more honestly?

### ② The “Reality of Expectations”

A transitional moment in the episode occurs when Hanan describes being stuck in the past and anticipating the future as “the reality of expectations” instead of the reality of the present moment. He emphatically explains that you have to be present in order to truly experience life and you must be flexible enough to be able to make the most out of life. One sure way to be in the present moment, Hanan says, is to be grateful.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772 – 1810, Ukraine) was one of the great mystical minds in Jewish tradition and the great grandson of the Ba’al Shem Tov. Over his lifetime, he revealed mystical and moral teachings for the Jewish community, highlighting the ability of every person to access these lessons. Rabbi Nachman’s teachings were ultimately compiled by his chief disciple, Rabbi Nosen. His writings emphasize the concept of “being present” by questioning the necessity and human understanding of, and connection to, time.

A person with complete understanding knows that time in this world is really nothing. The sensation of time stems from deficient understanding. The greater one’s understanding, the more one sees and understands that in reality, time does not exist. We can actually feel how time flies like a passing shadow and a cloud that will soon disappear. If you take this to heart you will be free of worries about mundane matters and you will have the strength and determination to snatch what you can – a good deed here, a lesson there – in order to gain something that is truly enduring out of this life. You will gain the life of the eternal world, which is completely beyond time.

*Likutey Etzot Wisdom 50*

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Rabbi Nachman later says:

You must make sure you set aside a time each day when you can reflect calmly on everything you are doing and the way you are behaving and ask if this is the right way to spend your days.

*Likutey Etzot 54*

1. Under what circumstances do you find yourself most likely to live in the “reality of expectations” and when in the present moment?
2. Do you have triggers that bring up expectations for yourself? What do they center around?
3. What is the greatest danger of being stuck in the “reality of expectations?”
4. Most often regret, sadness, and depression are signs of living in the past, while fear, worry, and want are signs of living in the future. What are the signs of living in the present?
5. When you feel grateful for the present, are you able to stay focused? Or, do the past and future creep into the conversation? Why is it so tough to stay in the present?

Rabbi Nachman encourages us to really take time out to reflect on our lives. While this is an important exercise, there is a concept in Judaism which sharpens the idea further. *Hakarat ha tov* (הכרת הטוב), “recognizing the good,” requires people to see exactly what is in their life at the present moment. Though it sounds simplistic, it can be a difficult task. Like Hanan’s “reality of expectations,” *hakarat ha tov* requires people to stop looking at what has already happened in their lives and what they hope might occur in the future, and to look only at what is. Incorporating Rabbi Nachman’s directive into this teaching and into your own life allows for reflection, specifically on the things for which you are grateful. It allows you to be connected to the present and ultimately connected to a kind of universal timelessness.

6. Would you realistically be able to set aside time each day for *hakarat ha tov*? What do you set aside time for daily? Why are those things important, and do you think they are as important as gratitude? Do you think Hanan’s father would be able to do this?
7. When do you feel most connected to the other people in your life? Why is that feeling important and what does it have to do with being present?
8. In response to Rabbi Nachman’s charge, do you feel that the way you have spent your day today was useful? If not, do you honestly believe there is anything you can do to change it? What do you think others would say?
9. Can being grateful, even for something small, alter your experience of life? Does that seem too simple? If so, how can the concept be deepened?
10. Thinking back on your life, was there ever something for which you didn’t feel grateful for at the time, that in hindsight you may see differently now?

### ③ Gratitude and Humility

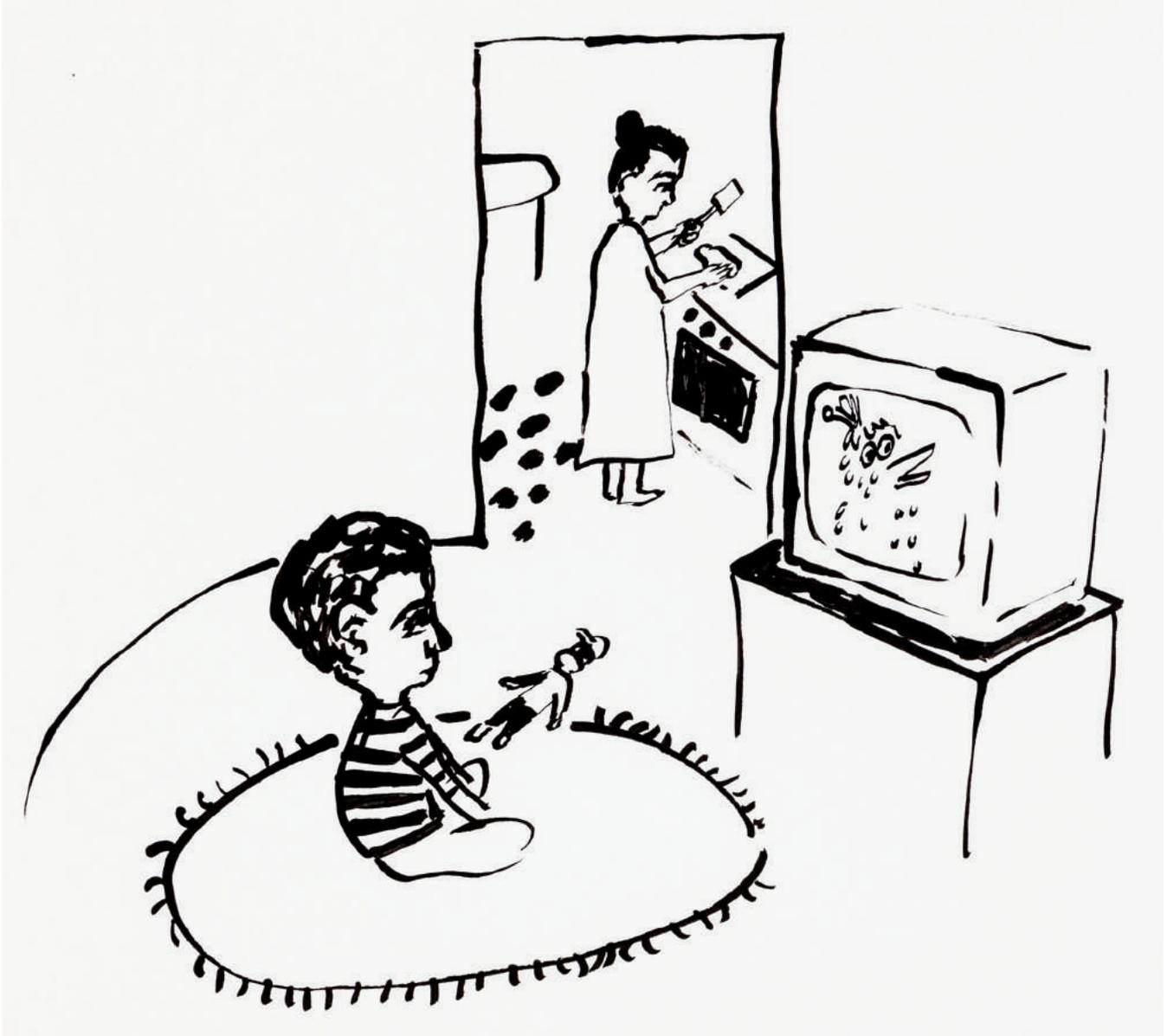
After talking to his father about gratitude on both simple and complex levels, Hanan teaches his father that gratitude can also bring about a profound sense of humility. When you realize how much there is to be grateful for, it is impossible not to feel humble. Jewish thought teaches that even when there are elements of your life that are not yet fulfilled, there is still much to be grateful for right now. Some of this inclination is borne from the difficult experiences of the Jewish community throughout history, but some is the acknowledgement that you are no greater than your neighbor. Recognizing this will likely overpower your ego, leaving you with a gentle humility about the reality of your own life.

A teaching from the Talmud highlights the idea of having some control over how we experience the world and our response to it.

What does a good guest say? “How much trouble my host has taken [for me]! How much meat he set before me! How much wine he set before me! How many cakes he has set before me! And all the trouble he has taken was only for my sake!” But what does a bad guest say? “How much, after all, has my host put himself out? I have eaten one piece of bread, I have eaten one slice of meat, I have drunk one cup of wine! All the trouble my host has taken was only for the sake of his wife and his children.”

*Berachot 58a*

1. What experiences in your life allow for gratitude and kindness? Do you think you respond to them as often as you would like? The preceding Talmud quote implies that people who are humble in the face of the experiences in their lives are “better” people. Do you agree? Why did the rabbis of the Talmud set up this dichotomy?
2. Hanan states that he felt humbled when he was confronted with how little control we actually have in our lives and this led him to be filled with gratitude. What is the connection between gratitude and humility? Is there one? If so, does humility lead to gratitude, or is it the other way around?
3. How can gratitude and appreciation act as a doorway to actually seeing what you have?
4. Do you believe that there are certain things in life that people inherently deserve? What happens if they don’t receive them? Is it possible to live without expecting anything, while still being grateful for what is received?
5. Hanan wants his father to be grateful for even the most basic act – breathing. What stops you from being grateful for even basic things like this?
6. Is there more power in showing gratitude for the seemingly simple parts of life, or for the deep and moving experiences in life? Name some examples of each in your life.



Untitled, 2002, 6 inches x 6 inches, ink on paper



WHEN YOU MEET ANOTHER PERSON,  
YOU ARE FACING **OTHERNESS**.  
IT'S VERY SCARY. SO YOU  
**FILL IN** WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW,  
WITH WHAT YOU **WANT**  
THE OTHER PERSON TO BE!



THAT'S WHY THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF A RELATIONSHIP FEEL SO GOOD!  
EVERYTHING ABOUT YOUR PARTNER IS **PERFECT!**  
BUT YOU ACTUALLY DON'T KNOW **ANYTHING** ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON.



YOU CONVINCED YOURSELF THAT IT'S  
THAT PERSON, BUT IT'S ACTUALLY  
JUST A REFLECTION OF YOUR OWN  
**EGO!** BUT **REAL LOVE** IS IN THE  
**SPACE BETWEEN** THE TWO PEOPLE  
WITHOUT THE EGO. THAT SPACE  
IS THE UNKNOWN, THE **FEAR!**



THIS DOESN'T  
SOUND VERY  
APPEALING...



IT'S NOT EASY, BUT IF WE CAN  
SEE THAT **FEAR** IS POINTING TO  
SOMETHING HIDDEN, AND **EMBRACE**  
THE **FEAR** AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO  
DISCOVER SOMETHING DEEPER,  
THEN **FEAR** CAN BECOME A CATALYST  
TO GROW BEYOND OURSELVES,  
AND IT IS IN **THAT SPACE**  
BEYOND OURSELVES, WHERE WE CAN  
FIND OUR **TRUE SELVES**, AND  
WHERE **REAL LOVE** EXISTS!

# Love & Fear

## אהבה ויראה

Love exists without worrying about being loved.

– *Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Lévinas*

• • • • •

Anyone who establishes a friendship for access to power, money or sexual relations; when these ends are not attainable, the friendship ceases...love that is not dependent on selfish ends is true love of the other person since there is no intended end.

– *Magen Avot, abridged and adapted translation*

• • • • •

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your being.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לֵבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדְךָ.

– *Deuteronomy 6:5*

• • • • •

All of the world is a very narrow bridge, but the most important thing is to never be afraid.

כל העולם כולו גשר צר מאוד והעיקר לא לפחד כלל.

– *Rabbi Nachman*

• • • • •

No purpose intervenes between I and Thou, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.

– *Martin Buber, I and Thou, p. 63*

• • • • •

Whenever a person rises from one level to the next, it necessitates that he first has a descent before the ascent. Because the purpose of any descent is always in order to ascend.

אך כשרוצים לצאת ממדרגה...למדרגה גבוה ממנה, צריך להיות ירידה קדם העליה, כי הירידה היא תכלית העליה.

– *Likutey Moharan 22:11*

• • • • •

Trust because there is hope.

וּבְטַחַת כִּי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה.

– *Job 11:18*

What is love really all about? Are there different kinds of love? How much does giving have to do with love? How much of love is about yourself, how much is about others, and, what do fish have to do with it?!

Beginning with the earliest stories in the Torah, Judaism emphasizes the importance of finding someone to love and holding on to that relationship. In later biblical writings, a romantic notion of love and relationship is highlighted, even used allegorically to symbolize the relationship between the Jewish people and God. In this episode, Hanan and his parents discuss the meaning of real love and how to find it. Together they begin a conversation which ultimately leads Hanan to the realization that real love has to do with the act of giving rather than a calculation of what one can get out of the relationship.

### ① It’s Not About You

One of the first concepts Hanan’s mother and father introduce is the idea that what we think of as love for another person may in actuality be a preoccupation with ourselves. While focusing on yourself is not necessarily bad, Hanan’s parents challenge him to decide whether the relationship Hanan is describing is really love. Using the midrash about fish love as their model, they push him to start thinking about the lesson of the Kotzker rabbi, Menachem Mendel Morgenstern (1787-1859, Poland). While this teaching about love is one of his best known, ironically he chose to live in near seclusion for the last twenty years of his life.

You don’t love fish, ... You love yourself!

1. Why is the surface feeling of joy around the fulfillment of wants and desires what some people understand as love?
2. Hanan’s parents point out that focusing on one’s own needs is not what love is about. Are they correct? If so, why?
3. In your opinion, what does love include? When you begin thinking about what love should include, do you find yourself starting to think more about what you are getting out of the relationship? If so, what does that mean?

Hanan defends himself by saying the following:

**HANAN:** Look...it’s complicated...I’m looking for something else...my life is going in a different direction. It’s nobody’s fault...I just always had a certain picture in my mind, of what I want out of my life and what I want in a relationship...and honestly, what I think I really need, is to find myself, you know, I need to spend a little time...focusing on me right now.

4. Are there points in your life when you have said or felt similar things?
5. While Hanan’s parents tell him the focus on himself is why he is having a hard time achieving love, is there any legitimacy to what Hanan says? Are there times in life when focusing on oneself might be helpful? When does it get in the way?
6. When have you found that letting go of your ego, and focusing on the other person, has enhanced a relationship?

### ② To Love is to Give

Hanan’s mother emphasizes a second message. She explains a concept to Hanan which is rooted in Jewish text when she says:

**MOMMY:** If you’re giving to the other person, expecting something in return, that’s not love. That’s a business deal. I give you this, you give me that...

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, also known as The Rashbatz (14th - 15th century, Spain), taught a similar message:

Anyone who establishes a friendship for access to power, money, or sexual relations; when these ends are not attainable, the friendship ceases...love that is not dependent on selfish ends is true love of the other person since there is no intended end.

*Magen Avot – abridged and adapted translation – prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein for the United Synagogue Conservative Yeshiva*

1. How hard is it to give, in the way Hanan’s mother and The Rashbatz describe, without expectations or worries — just genuine giving?

When you worry about what you will receive from giving, your ego is still involved in the relationship. Once you can move away from that, it is easier to relate to Hanan’s mother’s point:

**MOMMY:** Love is not a means to an end Hanan... It’s the end itself.

as well as Hanan’s father’s comment:

**DADDY:** If you truly GIVE...not in order to receive, not in exchange, or with expectations, or because you’re worried you’re going to be punished...if you SIMPLY GIVE in order to GIVE... because you truly WANT to give...something inside of YOU WANTS to GIVE...then...**the giving itself IS your reward...**

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2. How much of giving is rooted in self interest, expecting something in return? When are the times you felt you were able to give without it feeling conditional? What do you think giving has to do with love?

One of the most famous relational Jewish philosophers, Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995, France), said it this way:

Love exists without worrying about being loved.  
*Is it Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Lévinas, pg. 143*

3. What are the similarities between what Hanan's parents are saying and what Lévinas says?

### ③ God Love

And, now for the hard question. If, as Hanan's parents teach him, love is about letting go of one's ego, being able to give without worrying about what will come in return, how does that affect one's understanding of love for God? Jewish philosophers, commentators, and mystics through the ages have always maintained that love of God – no matter what your theology – is a challenging, but important aspect of Jewish life.

Deuteronomy commands that:

You shall Love Adonai your God with all your heart, all your soul,  
all your being.  
*Deuteronomy 6:5*

1. If you have a belief in God, do you feel that love for God, like love between people, is equally dependent on giving?
2. Is it harder to feel love toward God — without expectation — than toward others?

The sages interpret "You shall love Adonai your God" to mean:

You cause the name of Adonai to be beloved  
*Sifre, Deuteronomy 32*

Contemporary commentators explain that this means loving God through your actions. Love for God can be shown and even intensified by what you give and what you do.

3. When thinking about love for God, what kind of giving feels most sincere?
4. How would you describe the difference between fish love and real love?



Where does fear come from and what happens when you are afraid? How does fear affect your behavior, and in particular, how you treat the people around you? Is fear based on real danger, or is it at least partially in your head? And, are there ways to feel safe, even in frightening situations?

### ① Having Power and Feeling Powerful

From Biblical to contemporary times, examples of people exerting control or power over others are featured in some of our most absorbing tales. These characters, in stories ancient and modern, share one overarching similarity: feelings of fear, insecurity and powerlessness. People who are consumed by fear often need to control those around them and instill fear in others so that they themselves can feel more in control. It is a theme that is as common in the Bible as it is in modern day life.

From Biblical tradition, one of the most clear and extreme examples of deep fear manifesting itself as control over others is in the Purim story. Haman, the archetypal villain, masterminds the potential end of the Jewish people in order to retain his own power and feel in control. His plan is spurred by Mordechai’s refusal to bow down to him. Haman’s fear of the power of the Jewish people is subconscious, and results in his need to control them.

The lesson Hanan’s parents teach him about his boss could be also be applied to Haman:

**MOMMY:** Just because he’s conscious of what he’s doing, doesn’t mean he is conscious of WHY he’s doing it.... Ask yourself: why would he need to make everyone around him afraid?

**DADDY:** To have control over them. Ssssss!

**MOMMY:** But he already has control. He’s your boss. He can fire you... but just because someone is in power, doesn’t necessarily mean that they **feel** powerful. Deep deep down, inside, he **feels** out of control.

**HANAN:** Are you saying he’s afraid?

**MOMMY:** Not just afraid. He’s terrified. He’s consumed by his fear.

Hanan’s boss *needs* to feel in control, much like the Biblical Haman who feels weak and powerless, despite his position of power. At no point, however, does Haman explicitly acknowledge a fear of the Jews or of Mordechai. His fear instead manifests itself by manipulating King Achashverosh, who plays a part in his scheme, and by bullying the Jews themselves.

1. Although it is an ancient story, what feels realistic about this Biblical narrative?
2. What are examples of times in your own life when your fears or insecurities affected how you treated other people? Did you ultimately feel any consequences or realize the source of your actions?
3. What are examples of times when others’ fears and insecurities affected how they treated you?
4. What is the difference between *feeling* powerful and actually *having* power?
5. Hanan’s mother explains that the loss of control comes directly from a deep fear which has become his boss’s reality. What makes you most afraid, and how do you think you respond to it? Do you think you are aware of the fear?

### ② What We Think We Know

One of the key ideas in this animation is that reality is in large part based on how we *understand* reality. If there is a mistake in our knowledge, what we think we know, we build an entire reality based on a faulty premise.

This is illustrated in Hanan Harchol’s reading of God’s question to Adam and Eve “Who told you that you were naked?” Through his learning, Hanan created a new midrash around this question.

**Note:** A midrash is an interpretation of a text that might at first seem to have a simple meaning, but that asks for a deeper explanation. Midrash is often created from *chevruta* learning (חברותא, from the Hebrew root for the word “friend”), studying Jewish texts in a pair – with a friend or study partner. The concept is that as you study together you will each be able to bring in your knowledge of that textual source and your human experience, and from there the text will begin to blossom.

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The original Genesis text is:

They heard the sound of Adonai the Eternal moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day; and the man and his wife hid from Adonai the Eternal among the trees of the garden. Adonai the Eternal called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He replied "I heard the sound of You in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." Then God asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree from which I had forbidden you eat?"

*Genesis 3: 8-11*

In Hanan's midrash he uses the character of his mother, to interpret God's question to Adam and Eve "Who told you that you were naked?" Here is how Hanan's mother explains her point:

**MOMMY:** ...before eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve were naked and they felt no shame, and there's no mention of fear. Now, **after** eating from the Tree of Knowledge, their eyes are "opened" and they "realized" they are naked, and they are afraid. But the fear is only a result of this knowledge, this new understanding of nakedness as separation. And God asks: "Who told you that you are naked?..." What if God is actually questioning their knowledge — their understanding itself?

**DADDY:** Tzzz, but Irit, they are naked! It says so! That's why they need the bikinis!

**MOMMY:** Depends on how you see it. Instead of hearing God asking: "Who told you that you are naked?" as in "Tell Me who gave away the secret?" God might be saying: "Who told you that you are naked?" as in: "How do you know? According to whom? How do you know that you are separate from Me? Maybe your knowledge, your new way of understanding nakedness, is perhaps an illusion?"

Hanan's mother suggests that instead of the common interpretation that God is asking Adam and Eve who gave them the knowledge that they are naked, God might actually be questioning their knowledge, their new understanding of nakedness itself. What made them believe they were naked? What *made* them think they were any different than they were before?

Using this midrash, Hanan's mother teaches him to recognize that fear comes in part from knowledge, and that what you "know" often comes down to how you understand what is going on around you. But if the understanding is faulty, then the fear may be unwarranted, because it is based on a faulty understanding of reality.

1. Have there been times when you believed you were teaching truths, that in hindsight you now see differently?
2. Are there times in your life when you were convinced you were "naked?" How did you know? Could it have just been your perception?
3. How were those experiences affected by other people, and how did you respond to others based on what you believed?

### ③ A Very Narrow Bridge

Ultimately Hanan's mother teaches him that fear is often determined by how you see your reality, or more specifically, what you choose to focus on. If you focus on the dangers surrounding you, instead of focusing on the "bridge" of positive possibilities and outcomes, the fears can grow into a "reality of fears" in which the fears can consume you. In her example with the alligators, the abyss, and the cliff, Hanan's mother references a famous quote from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772 – 1810, Ukraine):

All of the world is a very narrow bridge, but the most important thing is to never be afraid.

To illustrate Rabbi Nachman's teaching, Hanan's mother creates a scenario of walking across a room without stepping off of a wide row of floor tiles. The task seems simple at first. But when she adds the detail of a cliff on either side of the tiles with alligators and an abyss, one quickly forgets about the simplicity of the task and focuses instead on the danger, creating a reality that is entirely fearful. Hanan's mother shows him that sometimes what you focus on in your life affects your reality itself. By focusing on the fears instead of the "bridge" one can quickly become consumed by fear which leads to feelings of powerlessness, as described in Section 1.

1. Do you find that you are able to think along the lines of what Hanan's mother says? Do you agree that feeling fearful comes from what you focus on?
2. Are you the kind of person who is more apt to focus on "the bridge," or the kind of person who is more apt to focus on the dangers which might also exist?
3. When have you allowed fear to affect how you see reality?
4. Hanan's mother points out that Hanan has "adopted" his boss's reality of fears. When have you allowed others' fears to affect or influence your own reality?

Is love related to fear, and if so, how? How can the space between two people actually bring you closer together? What can you learn from fear? And even when you are fearful, can you choose to trust?



In the third and final installment of the Love & Fear trilogy, Hanan’s parents teach him that although it may seem counterintuitive, fear is an essential ingredient to finding real love. Judaism agrees. Jewish wisdom, teaching, and stories frequently pair the two emotions, both in describing love and fear of God and between people. In fact, rabbinic commentary teaches the same lesson Hanan hears from his parents: the importance of learning and embracing fear in order to experience genuine love.

### ① The Space Between Two People

Real love, as Hanan’s parents teach, can only exist in the space between two people, without the ego.

Martin Buber (1878–1965, Austria), one of the twentieth century’s most influential philosophers and theologians, created a relational model which he called *I-Thou*. Buber differentiates between relationships which are primarily based on important but largely straightforward interactions (*I-It*) and those which are deeply interpersonal (*I-Thou*). Because of the challenge in negating our own egotistical needs while recognizing the space between people, *I-Thou* relationships are rare. But they are the relationships we each strive to have.

In describing the goal of *I-Thou* relationships, Buber explains the importance of removing the ego from the space between people:

No purpose intervenes between I and Thou, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.

*I and Thou (1970), page 63*

1. Buber teaches that in an *I-Thou* relationship, the space between people has no obstacles. How does this kind of relationship feel different than one that is weighed down with expectations or needs?
2. What do you think Buber means when he says “no purpose intervenes between I and Thou?”
3. In which of your own relationships do you feel your ego is least present? When are you able to put your ego aside and let the other person really be who he or she really is?

Hanan’s mother adds another element to the relationship between fear and love and the space between two people. She adds that while it is important to remove the ego from the space between two people, it is also in this space where an important kind of fear can live. She teaches where and how fear exists in the paradigm of love.

**MOMMY:** Real love needs to be created, in the space **between** the two people **without** the ego. That space **between** the two people is the **unknown**, the uncertainty, the otherness...the FEAR.

1. Why do *you* think otherness and uncertainty feels so frightening?
2. Based on the midrash in this episode about Adam and Eve, what can you do to make the space between you and others feel less scary? When do you feel it is most present?
3. What are examples in your own life of real love or a relationship that was created, as Hanan’s mother says, “in the space between two people without the ego?”

### ② What Can You Learn From Fear?

Once the inherent uncertainty and fear that exists in the space between people is acknowledged it can offer a way to grow. Though it is difficult, by *embracing* fear you can actually get much deeper, because fear is always pointing to something which is hidden. By following fear, rather than avoiding it, fear can teach us essential things about ourselves and our relationships. This is ultimately a necessary part of growth and love.

One of the core ideas of Chasidic thought from teachers as varied as Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810) to the Sefat Emet, Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847–1905), is that when you fall, when you have fear, *if* you embrace it, you have the chance to learn from it.

Rabbi Nachman taught:

Whenever a person rises from one level to the next, it necessitates that he first has a descent before the ascent. Because the purpose of any descent is always in order to ascend.

*Likutey Moharan I, 22*

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Hanan's mother teaches it this way:

**MOMMY:** ...They say that when we're falling, we should be happy, because we're being taught how to get back up....

She goes on to incorporate this teaching with previous ones taught earlier in the episode:

**MOMMY** ...if we embrace the fear as an **opportunity** to discover something deeper,... something more meaningful,... then... fear can become a catalyst to GROW **BEYOND** ourselves, ... and it is in **THAT** space **beyond** ourselves, ...without ego, where we can ultimately find our **true** selves, where can find meaning, and where **REAL LOVE** exists!

Hanan's mother wants him to see that when there is fear, you can embrace it as an opportunity for growth.

1. Does the concept of "embracing fear" feel counterintuitive to you or do you agree with its ultimate necessity?
2. When have there been moments in your life when you were able to embrace fear? What have you learned from the experience? What were the differences between the times when embracing fear did and didn't work for you?
3. How difficult is it to choose to embrace something which is frightening? Does the idea that real love can emerge from the choice make it easier or is that an outcome which is too hard to contemplate from the outset?

### ③ Embracing Fear and Realizing the Power in Faith

This episode ends with a powerful and mystical statement by Hanan's mother, as well as a deeply symbolic story told by Hanan's father. The dialogue is filled with essential Jewish teachings which open up ideas about the transformational power of faith and hope.

**MOMMY:** ...letting go of the ego and embracing fear is possibly the most difficult thing a person can do...But if one chooses to do it, if you choose to trust because there is hope,...then your choice gives meaning to the idea of Echad.

**HANAN:** What's Echad?

**DADDY:** One.

**HANAN:** One?

**DADDY:** There is a story about a ship that was in the middle of the ocean, in the middle of a terrible storm. All of the passengers were hiding below the deck. But a young boy was outside, on the deck sitting calmly. One of the passengers asked the boy: "Aren't you afraid?" And the boy answered: "No, my father is the captain."

Hanan's mother's statement has two very important teachings in it. The first teaching is a quote taken from the Book of Job:

Job, even in the midst of the most challenging trials, including the loss of his wife, his children, his health, and his livelihood, continues to choose to have faith in God. His friends try to offer words of comfort. Though their theology is simplistic, largely based on reward and punishment, in regard to the calamities which have befallen Job, one friend, Zophar, encourages Job to still have faith. Zophar tells him:

Trust because there is hope.

*Job 11:18*

Hanan's mother then explains that if you "trust because there is hope,...then your choice gives meaning to the idea of *Echad*." This second teaching delves deep into Jewish mysticism. *Echad* (אחד), is the Hebrew word for One. The idea of One is central to Judaism, encompassing everything from the Jewish understanding of God, to the importance of community and peoplehood.

Part of the power of *Echad* is its inherent paradox. In Jewish teaching *Echad* is One, yet at the same time, "everything" is a part of *Echad*. Defying logic and common understanding, *Echad* is simultaneously One and "everything." Hanan's father attempts to illustrate some of the power and meaning of the paradox of *Echad* through his story. In it, the boy's calmness seems counterintuitive and unexpected in a situation that would normally and logically evoke tremendous fear. Everyone around him is afraid and while the boy "should" be afraid, he isn't. He feels something that the others do not.

Hanan Harchol, the author of the script, felt that on the surface, the story of the boy and the ship might appear to convey that we should simply accept difficult things without frustration or that we should not worry even in the midst of impossibly dangerous situations, relying on a type of "blind" faith. But Hanan believes that the story actually points to something far deeper: if we can let go of our ego, embrace fear, and learn from it, letting go of our earthly logic can connect us to something much larger.

In the context of a relationship, while it is very frightening to encounter another person, while the space in between us can feel like a chasm, by giving in to that fear and trusting that it will be safe, we can begin to experience genuine love. Choosing to trust because there is hope, even in the face of utter fear, can make all of the things that don't make sense, make sense. It is essentially a statement of faith.

1. What was your first reaction to the story about the boy on the ship?
2. How does Hanan Harchol's explanation deepen the idea of faith for you?
3. Have you ever been in an incredibly dangerous situation? How did you respond? How would you respond differently now?
4. What does "Trust because there is hope" mean to you?



MAKE SURE YOUR WINDOW IS **NOT** FACING YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WINDOW, BECAUSE WHEN YOU LOOK INTO YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WINDOW YOU TURN YOUR NEIGHBOR INTO THEIR POSSESSIONS INSTEAD OF SEEING THE WHOLE PERSON, AND YOU LOSE YOUR CONNECTION TO WHAT YOU HAVE!



I DON'T SEE WHY LOOKING AT ANOTHER PERSON'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS HAS TO BE ALL BAD. ENVY **MOTIVATED** ME TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE AND GO TO THE GYM TO LOSE WEIGHT!



LIFE IS SO **UNFAIR!**

YOUR ENVY CAN CONSUME YOU, BUT IT CAN ALSO BE A **KEY**, A SOURCE, A WELL!



**FOLLOW** YOUR ENVY, TO DISCOVER WHAT YOU'RE **REALLY** AFTER, INSTEAD OF CHASING ANOTHER PERSON'S **DREAM** THAT YOU ADOPTED! STOP LOOKING IN OTHER PEOPLE'S WINDOWS!

# Envy

## קנאה

One must not make their windows to open into the courtyard of joint holders... One may not open into the courtyard of joint holders by a door opposite a door [of another], or by a window opposite [another's] window.

לא יפתח אדם חלונותיו לחצר השתפין... לא יפתח אדם לחצר השתפין פתח כנגד פתח וחלון כנגד חלון.

– *Bava Batra Mishnah 3:7*

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Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: The words, 'Behold, it was very good' refer to the impulse to good, the words, 'Behold, it was very good' refer to the impulse to evil. But how can the impulse to evil be termed 'very good'? Because Scripture teaches that were it not for the impulse to evil, a person would not build a house, get married, beget children, or engage in commerce. All such activities come, as Solomon noted (Ecclesiastes 4:4), 'from a man's rivalry with his neighbor.'

רב שמואל בר נחמן אמר הנה טוב מאד זה יצר הרע, וכי יצר הרע טוב מאד, אתמהא, אלא שאלולי יצר הרע לא בנה אדם בית ולא נשא אשה, ולא הוליד ולא נשא ונתן, וכן שלמה אומר (קהלת ד) כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו.

– *Genesis Rabbah 9:7*

• • • • •

Rabbi Elazar HaKapar said: Envy... takes a person out of this world.

רבי אליעזר הקפרי אומר הקנאה... מוציאה את האדם מן העולם:

– *Pirkei Avot 4:21*

• • • • •

Envy amongst scholars increases wisdom.

קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה.

– *Bava Batra 21b-22a*

• • • • •

Thus, according to Rav Nachman, it is through the confrontation rather than the repression of the inclination that man can realize his true greatness.

– *Nechama Leibowitz on Genesis Rabbah 9:7*

Where does envy originate? Does it always have to be bad? Is there anything you can learn about yourself from being envious of others? What is the key to understanding Judaism’s seemingly contradictory response to feelings of envy?

People strive to do the best they can, focusing on their own potential as selflessly as possible. But Judaism teaches that there are times when most people also experience the very human emotion of envy. Jewish wisdom on this emotion is complex and paradoxical, instructing that envy can be both harmful and helpful in one’s life. While envy can “take us out of this world,” envy can also offer the key to change and improvement. In parsing the many seemingly contradictory Jewish teachings on envy, it comes down to the individual and how he or she *chooses to react* to feelings of envy. That process ultimately determines envy’s usefulness and/or destructiveness.

### ① Looking in Other People’s Windows

Envy can be immensely destructive. The insecurities you may have about your own achievements might push you to see others as more successful or accomplished than you. You may feel that the world’s “unfairness” or injustice plays out in others having, getting, or taking more than you might feel they deserve. Alternatively, those same insecurities can drive you to hope others will be envious of what you have. These examples of destructive envy, on their own, with no further insight, breed resentment, which is poisonous.

The Mishnah, written over 1,500 years ago, and one of the first codes of Jewish law, addresses envy’s destructive power directly in this passage:

Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar said: envy, lust and honor take a person out of this world.

*Pirkei Avot 4:21*

1. What do you think it means when the rabbis of *Pirkei Avot* say that envy, lust, and honor take a person out of this world? What unifies these three emotions?
2. How does being envious of others cause you to lose sight of what you otherwise find important? How often do you experience this?
3. Feeling envy towards others can be a way of pushing a deeper issue off of yourself and onto someone else. Is there an example in your own life when you did this? Can you think of a time when someone has done the same to you? What would you say to that person now?

4. How do your insecurities manifest themselves in wanting others to envy you? How do you feel when this happens?
5. Though on the surface it might initially make you feel good about yourself, what do you think you would *really* say to someone who was envious of you?

The Mishnah also addresses the problem of envy with a peculiar (and quite pragmatic) instruction:

One must not make their windows to open into the courtyard of joint holders.

*Bava Batra Mishnah 3:7*

The text goes on to say:

One may not open into the courtyard of joint holders by a door opposite a door [of another], or by a window opposite [another’s] window.

Essentially, when building a house or making changes to an existing house, you may not build a door or window directly facing your neighbor’s door or window.

This concept is known as *הזק ראייה* (*hezek r’iyah*), a visual intrusion, or damage caused by looking. It highlights the need for privacy based on the damage that can be done when others can see what you own – or vice versa. For *viewers* it can cause feelings of envy and as a result, cause them to lose a connection and appreciation for what they have. Furthermore, it can cause viewers to define the other person solely by their possessions, instead of seeing the other person as a whole, complex person. For the *ones being seen*, it can hold them back from fully focusing on their own life because they become concerned with how other people are seeing them.

1. How often do you find yourself noticing what others have? Do you notice it and let it pass, notice it in relation to what you lack, or notice it in relation to what you have? What do you think is at the heart of each of these responses?
2. In what ways do Hanan and his mother spend too much time looking in other people’s windows? Do you fault them for their reactions, or do you find their behavior perfectly human? How similar are their reactions to the way *you* respond to what others have?
3. Have you considered that noticing what someone else might *not* have, even when it might lead to an act of giving, may ultimately still have to do with your own ego and what you may feel you lack yourself?

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## ② Envy As Motivator

Judaism has much to say about how envy, in its most *positive* application, can be an excellent tool to find drive and motivation.

Referring to the creation story, the following teaching is presented in *Midrash Rabbah*, a collection of teachings written around the 5th century, but including texts as old as the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E.

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: The words, 'Behold, it was very good' refer to the impulse to good, and the words, 'Behold, it was very good' refer to the impulse to evil. But how can the impulse to evil be termed 'very good'? Because Scripture teaches that were it not for the impulse to evil, a person would not build a house, get married, beget children, or engage in commerce. All such activities come, as Solomon noted (*Ecclesiastes 4:4*), 'from a man's rivalry with his neighbor.'  
*Genesis Rabbah 9:7*

This sentiment is echoed by Mommy:

**MOMMY:** I don't see why looking at another person's accomplishments has to be all bad. Envy-ing Ruti motivated me to learn a new language. Envy motivated me to get off the couch and go to the gym to lose weight. (By the way, this week, I lost two pounds at the Weight Watcher).

**DADDY (looking at Hanan sheepishly):** ...Hmmm.....your mother has a point. Envy can also be a source of inspiration.

**HANAN:** But there is a distinction in what you are saying Mommy. You're starting out with envy, but immediately turning back to yourself and your own potential. You're not saying "I want her house," you're saying, "look at how she maximized her potential, I can also maximize my own potential."

**MOMMY (triumphantly):** That's EXACTLY what I've been trying to tell both of you this entire time!

Hanan understands Mommy's statement to mean that if envy helps you reflect and improve upon yourself then it can be beneficial.

1. When has envying someone else pushed you to improve yourself?

There is a Chasidic notion that when "you become bigger, I do not become smaller." It is often explained by using the analogy of lighting one candle from another. The act of lighting a new candle does not diminish the light of the original candle.

2. Why does it sometimes feel like acknowledging what someone else has diminishes what you have? Is this feeling more or less intense when it involves a friend or close acquaintance?

3. In what ways can you try to accustom yourself to see it the other way – encouraging yourself to grow instead of feeling envious?
4. Is there a negative consequence for others if envying them provides you motivation to change yourself? If so, what is it, and is it worth the motivation it might provide? What if you were the one being envied. Would that change your response?
5. What triggers envy in you? Are the triggers easy to identify? How comfortable do you feel sharing them with others? By identifying them, does it make it easier to let go of them a little?

## ③ Using Envy As A Key To Look Inside Of Yourself

Envy is complicated. As described in Section 1, Judaism teaches that envy can make us lose touch with ourselves and with other people. However, Judaism also teaches that envy can be used as a key to discover something hidden within ourselves, and as such, envy can be an immensely valuable tool for growth. Daddy touches on this idea when he and Hanan discuss Hanan's disappointments regarding Jenny and his current situation. Daddy points out that the benefit of going beyond just envying what others have is that Hanan may be able to figure out the root of his feelings.

**DADDY:** Really? Think about Kevin who had the car. He wasn't even aware of the car because he was so focused on getting Jenny. Instead of looking outside to the next accomplishment, you could be looking inside of yourself.

**HANAN:** Well, that's just disappointing.

**DADDY:** But at least it's YOURS! Maybe if you focus on it and struggle with it, the disappointment will turn into a new source, a well. Maybe you'll find out what you're really after, instead of chasing another person's dream that you adopted...

**MOMMY (cynically):** And maybe Hanan *simply* wants what Jason has, because he feels he deserves it too?

**DADDY:** What are these things we so desperately want? Think about it, is this really about Jason, or even Jenny? If you were with Jenny, would all your problems really be solved?

**HANAN:** Probably not. But I'd be happier.

**DADDY:** How do you know?...And besides, if what you want is to be happier, then maybe it would be more effective to focus on what is making you unhappy?

**HANAN:** The fact that he has something that I want! THAT is making me unhappy!

**DADDY:** Again, you're looking outside. Envy can be a quick solution, Hanan. You focus on the other person so you don't have to focus on yourself. But the SAME envy can also be a key to discovering something more meaningful that is unresolved within you!

**HANAN:** And what would that be?

**DADDY:** How should I know? It's YOUR key!!! But you have to choose to look INSIDE instead of outside at Jason or Jenny. Follow your envy to figure out where the real hole is! What is the source? Where is the beginning of the story? **Stop looking in other people's windows.**

Daddy tries to point out to Hanan that envy and disappointment aren't necessarily harmful. If you become aware of your feelings of envy, if you observe your envy, even embrace your envy and follow it inward to its source within you (as opposed to staying focused outward, on the other person), envy can ultimately offer a phenomenal opportunity for discovery and growth. At its most paradoxical, Judaism even teaches that envy, if followed inwardly, can become a well, a source, instead of something that consumes you.

Referring to the same quote from *Bereshit Rabbah 9:7* that was listed in Section 2, Nechama Leibowitz (1905-1997, Latvia), a highly regarded contemporary commentator, has a similar interpretation to Daddy about envy and its potential for allowing growth:

Thus, according to Rav Nachman, it is through the confrontation rather than the repression of the inclination that man can realize his true greatness.

Nechama Leibowitz, [http://www.lookstein.org/nechama\\_parasha1\\_bereshit.htm](http://www.lookstein.org/nechama_parasha1_bereshit.htm), (*Genesis Rabbah 9:7*)

In both Daddy's advice to Hanan, as well as Leibowitz's interpretation of *Bereshit Rabbah*, people are encouraged to think about envy in a different way. Daddy and Leibowitz point out that feelings of envy mask deeper internal issues; that the feelings themselves can point to something deeper inside of you. They encourage people to engage with the feelings, to live in the discomfort, and see what can be learned from the feelings.

1. What makes it so hard to move from engaging with the discomfort you may feel, to turning inward, embracing the discomfort, and learning from it? What can the benefit be if you follow through till the end? In what way does each step advance you to the next?
2. Daddy says "But you have to choose to look INSIDE, instead of outside at Jason and Jenny and everything external." Are the things you envy sometimes surface concerns, and not really the deeper issues you may have?
3. What are the reasons you might be nervous about confronting the deeper issues behind the envy you might feel toward others?
4. How do you feel about the idea that growth sometimes requires such difficult and intense work?



HUMILITY IS NOT TO GIVE UP.  
IT'S TO ACCEPT YOURSELF  
THE WAY YOU ARE, WHICH THEN  
ALLOWS YOU TO ACCEPT AND  
RESPECT OTHER PEOPLE.



TO BE HUMBLE IS TO BE LIKE THE EARTH. EARTH HAS A GRAVITATIONAL PULL.  
IF YOU INSIST BEING ABOVE, EVERYONE WILL RUN AWAY FROM YOU,  
BUT BEING BELOW HAS THE OPPOSITE EFFECT.

IT'S INSIDE OF THE EARTH THAT PLANTS GROW.  
YOU CAN FACILITATE THE GROWTH OF OTHERS  
BECAUSE EVERYONE CAN FEEL IMPORTANT  
AND UNIQUE AROUND YOU.



WELL THAT'S VERY ALTRUISTIC,  
BUT WHAT HAPPENS TO ME?



YOU DON'T BECOME **LESS** BECAUSE OTHERS BECOME MORE. IT'S ACTUALLY THE OPPOSITE:  
THE EARTH **EXPANDS** AS THE PLANT GROWS, LIKE A MOTHER'S WOMB. YOU DISCOVER AN  
INNER FLEXIBILITY, A **STRENGTH** THAT WAS PREVIOUSLY **HIDDEN**, BECAUSE YOU WERE SO BUSY  
RACING TO THE TOP. BEING HUMBLE DOES NOT MEAN TO BE WEAK, IT MEANS TO BE STRONG.

# Humility

## עֲנוּה

The Tzaddik is the “earth,” for “the Tzaddik is the foundation of the world” (Proverbs 10:25) and everything rests upon him. The Tzaddik has a gravitational power of attraction that draws everything to him, for the true Tzaddik is the foundation of the world and everything derives from him. All the other Tzaddikim are only branches of the true Tzaddik, each according to his level: one may be a branch while another may be a branch of a branch. For this unique Tzaddik is humble and lowly and makes himself like dust: for “I am dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). He is the foundation of the world precisely because he is “dust” and thus he supports everything.

כי הצדיק הוא יסוד עולם כמו שכתוב: “וצדיק יסוד עולם” (משלי י) וכל הדברים עומדים עליו ויש לו כח המושך, להמשיך כל הדברים אליו כי זה הצדיק, הוא רק יחיד בעולם, שהוא יסוד עולם שכל הדברים נמשכים ממנו ואפילו כל הצדיקים הם רק ענפים ממנו, כל אחד לפי בחינתו יש שהוא בחינות ענף ממנו ויש שהוא בחינות ענף מן הענף כי זה הצדיק היחיד בעולם, הוא ענו ושפל ומשים עצמו כעפר, בבחינות: “ואנכי עפר ואפר” ועל כן הוא יסוד עולם, הינו בחינת עפר, שכל הדברים הם עליו.

– *Likutey Moharan I, 70*

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The ornament of the Torah is wisdom; and the ornament of wisdom is humility.

הדר תורה, חכמה. הדר חכמה, ענוה.

– *Derech Erez Zuta 4:4*

• • • • •

The Torah teaches that anyone who is humble, the spirit of God is destined to rest upon him.

מגיד הכתוב שכל מי שהוא ענו, סופו להשרות שכינה עם האדם בארץ.

– *Mechilta, Yitro 9*

• • • • •

R. Joseph said: Man should always learn from the mind of his Creator; for behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His Spirit to abide upon Mount Sinai, and ignored all the beautiful trees and caused His Spirit to abide in a bush.

א”ר יוסף: לעולם ילמד אדם מדעת קונו, שהרי הקב”ה הניח כל הרים וגבעות והשרה שכינתו על הר סיני, והניח כל אילנות טובות והשרה שכינתו בסנה.

– *Sotah 5a*

• • • • •

If a person makes himself like the wilderness which everyone treads upon (i.e. he is humble) then he will retain his studies, but if not, he will not retain his studies.

אם משים אדם עצמו כמדבר זה, שהכל דשין בו – תלמודו מתקיים בידו. ואם לאו – אין תלמודו מתקיים בידו.

– *Eruvin 54a*

Can being humble actually be a source of strength? What does it mean to be “like the earth?” How can I let go of needing the recognition of others, and if I support the advancement of others, can it lead to my own growth as well? What does it mean to bend?

In this episode of *Jewish Food For Thought*, Hanan and his father dig into the topic of humility. Daddy shows Hanan that humility is about letting go of our insistence on trying to control everything around us, and recognizing that we’re human; this includes limiting how much credit we take when things go well, while also curbing how much we punish ourselves when things go badly. Being humble actually helps us maximize our learning and our growth, while at the same time helps to facilitate the growth of those around us. And, humility ultimately offers us the chance to be part of something bigger than ourselves. As you have undoubtedly heard before, in Jewish tradition humility is so honored we are taught that Moses, our most elevated teacher, was also the most humble.

Hanan’s father focuses on the seemingly paradoxical nature of being humble. Hanan worries that being humble makes a person weak. His father, however, shows him that precisely the opposite is true.

At the end of the *Amidah*, a core prayer in daily and *Shabbat* liturgy, a petition written by Mar son of Rabina (a 4th century Babylonian teacher) asks for the following:

Let my soul be like dust.

Why would we pray to be like the dust, like the earth? It seems like a strange thing to pray for, but by using the essence of teachings by a teacher of mysticism, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772 – 1810, Ukraine), Daddy explains that being like the earth actually has many advantages.

## ① The Power of the Earth

Rabbi Nachman teaches that humility, just like the earth, has a gravitational pull. People do not want to be around someone who needs to be above or superior to them all the time. By being humble, people around you are given the space to feel their uniqueness, and they don’t feel the need to fight for their place, which ultimately draws them to you.

**Note:** In his description, Rabbi Nachman uses the term “*Tzaddik*.” In Jewish mystical terms the *Tzaddik* is someone who is completely righteous, the role model for behavior.

All things and all creatures stand on the earth all the time. The only way anything can leave the earth is if some countervailing force overcomes the pull of gravity, distancing the object from the earth in accordance with the strength of the countervailing force. As soon as the countervailing force ceases, the object returns to earth.

Thus when a person throws an object upwards, the force that he applies distances it from the earth: the greater his strength, the higher he can throw it. Afterwards, however, when the countervailing force is spent, the object falls back down to the ground because of the gravitational pull of the earth, which draws everything to it. Were it not for this, nothing would stay on earth, because the earth is a round ball and everyone in the world stands on its surface. It is because of the earth’s gravitational pull that a thrown object falls back down to earth as soon as the countervailing force ceases.

The *Tzaddik* is the “earth,” for “the *Tzaddik* is the foundation of the world” (*Proverbs 10:25*) and everything rests upon him. **The *Tzaddik* has a gravitational power of attraction that draws everything to him,** for the true *Tzaddik* is the foundation of the world and everything derives from him. All the other *Tzaddikim* are only branches of the true *Tzaddik*, each according to his level: one may be a branch while another may be a branch of a branch. For this unique *Tzaddik* is humble and lowly and makes himself like dust: for “I am dust and ashes” (*Genesis 18:27*). **He is the foundation of the world precisely because he is “dust” and thus he supports everything.**

*Likutey Moharan I, 70*

When Hanan’s father talks about being like the earth, he says:

**DADDY:** If you insist on being above everyone, everyone feels so little around you, no one can grow around you, they will run away from you, but if you consider being below, it has the opposite effect.

1. Let’s start with a hard question to answer. What are examples of times you felt you needed to be above others? Why did you feel it was necessary? In hindsight, do you still think it was? Could you have responded by being more humble?
2. In what ways do you bring yourself below others? Do you feel that you do it genuinely, like a *Tzaddik*, or is it less natural? How hard is it to do?

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- How does it feel when you are “below?” Do you feel diminished, or strong? Something in between?
- Who are the people in your life who make you feel elevated, as though they give you space to grow? For whom have you done that?

## ② The Nourishing Earth

Considering that in modern society we are constantly being told to look out for ourselves, it is hard to change our frame of reference around humility. Being humble asks us to remember that allowing someone else to grow, even more so, facilitating someone else’s growth, doesn’t take away from our own growth. In fact, it offers both us and others the chance to learn and be a part of creation. It doesn’t need to be a zero-sum game where one loses when the other gains. In reality, neither needs to lose.

Hanan is initially resistant to the idea of nourishing others, and thinks that by helping others grow, he may be sacrificing or “missing out” himself.

Daddy responds:

**DADDY:** You don’t become less because others become more. It’s actually the opposite: the earth expands as the plant grows, like a mother’s womb. By being like the earth, you actually become a partner in creation.

While the Rabbi Nachman quote used above in Section One encompasses the idea of humility having a gravitational pull, it includes Daddy’s idea as well:

...for the true *Tzaddik* is the foundation of the world and **everything derives from him**. All the other *Tzaddikim* are only **branches** of the true *Tzaddik*, each according to his level: **one may be a branch while another may be a branch of a branch**. For this unique *Tzaddik* is humble and lowly and makes himself like dust: for “I am dust and ashes” (*Genesis 18:27*). He is the foundation of the world precisely because he is “dust” and **thus he supports everything**.

*Likutey Moharan I, 70*

- How does the idea of growing together strike you? To what extent do you feel that when you allow others to grow, you grow as well? Does one of you gain more than the other? Does it matter? In what ways does this teaching align with the idea of the branches in the Rabbi Nachman quote?
- Think of a time when you have helped someone to grow, or learn, or succeed. Did you feel lessened by the experience, or did you feel that you grew as well?

- What steps would Hanan need to take to shift from his perspective to his father’s? How many of those steps would you be able to take? How many do you think you *need* to take?

Hanan’s father includes the powerful statement that when you grow together, you become a partner in creation.

- What do you think Hanan’s father means when he talks about being a “partner in creation?” The Torah and later rabbinic text teach that God needs our help in order to finish creation. How do we do that? Does helping other people grow feel like a beginning to that process? How does it make you feel when you think about being a part of something as infinite as creation?

## ③ Making Yourself Low Like the Earth Allows You to Learn

Hanan’s father adds a third benefit of humility, continuing Rabbi Nachman’s analogy of the earth. While it may seem counterintuitive, Daddy reassures Hanan that there is actually a benefit to being humble. It isn’t only about helping others grow and learn, it is also about gaining something for yourself.

**DADDY:** ...by making yourself low, like the earth, you yourself gain the capacity to receive and to grow and learn.

There is a discussion about humility in the Talmud (the Jewish code of law codified around the year 500 C.E.), as it relates to the meaning of a phrase in the Torah describing the Israelites’ travels.

Here is the Torah text:

And from the wilderness to Mattanah...

And here is what the Talmud says it means:

If a person makes himself like the wilderness which everyone treads upon (i.e. he is humble) then he will retain his studies, but, if no, he will not retain his studies.

The Talmud later continues:

Then the Torah is given to him as a gift.

*Eruvin 54a*

The rabbis create a beautiful wordplay with Mattanah, which is both the name of a place and the Hebrew word for “gift.” If you act with the humility of the wilderness, you will learn more and receive a *mattanah*. They go so far as to say that when you are humble, the studies you retain, or the gift, is Torah – the most important gift in their worldview.

1. What do you think this teaching means? In your opinion, does humility have anything to do with one’s capacity to learn? Have you ever had the experience of learning more as a result of being more humble?
2. Have you ever felt that your capacity to learn was impeded by a lack of humility? If so, what was it specifically that prevented you from being able to learn?
3. What distinguishes learning that happens through humility versus learning in “non-humble” ways? Is there a difference? Does learning through humility feel like a gift to you, as the rabbi’s describe?

Daddy adds that by making yourself low, like the earth, you gain the unique space and perspective to be able to receive and learn in a way that you can’t when you’re busy fighting for control or focused on getting other people’s recognition.

**DADDY:** Can you really learn, Hanan, when you are busy trying to show everyone how much you know?

4. Have you ever focused so much on how other people think of you that you’ve missed out on a learning opportunity? Why do you think people care about what other people think of them?

### ④ Bend

Along with Rabbi Nachman’s teachings about the earth, Hanan’s father points out that humility can reveal inner strength. In response to Hanan saying it is against his nature to “be like the earth,” Daddy pointedly responds:

**DADDY:** That’s actually the deepest meaning of humility. To make the choice to go against your nature. To have flexibility, to bend.

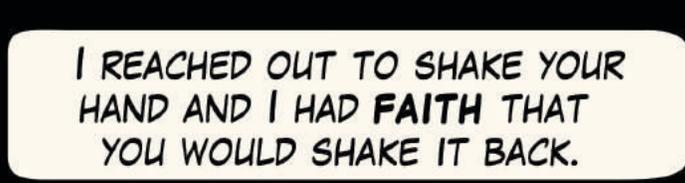
Daddy continues:

**DADDY:** It’s not a sacrifice. On the contrary. It’s uncovering your hidden flexibility and power. You discover new possibilities within yourself, it’s recognizing we are not as limited as we thought, and at the same time discovering your role as a part of something larger.

Daddy says that by bending, by moving out of your comfort zone or “giving in,” you are forced to find new solutions. In addition to being empowering, you can gain a new perspective in which you, and your insistence on control, are not at the center. This in turn allows you to connect to, and participate in, something much bigger and greater than yourself.

1. Why does giving up control seem so hard? What happens when you find out you can do it?
2. Do you think people who are flexible are “giving in,” or are they able to bend in a way that allows for new ideas? Can you think of a time when you were flexible and it allowed you to see a scenario in a new way?
3. How do you think being flexible allows you to learn more?
4. How difficult is it for you to let go of control? Is it the same in your professional life as in your personal life? What kinds of situations are the most challenging?
5. Tying many of his teachings together, Daddy challenges Hanan to think of something he believes he can’t live without and to give it up. What would you choose? How would this exercise compel you to be more humble and what might the benefit be?

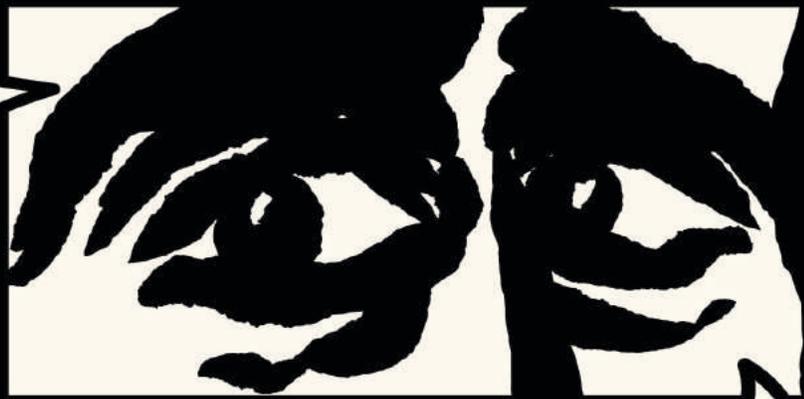




I REACHED OUT TO SHAKE YOUR HAND AND I HAD **FAITH** THAT YOU WOULD SHAKE IT BACK.



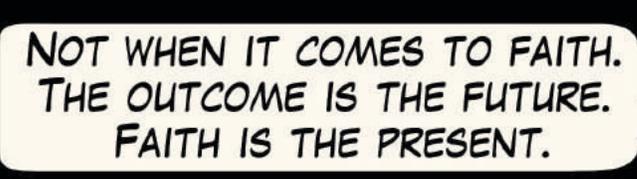
BUT WHAT IF I HADN'T?!?



THEN YOU WOULDN'T HAVE. IT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT IN THE MOMENT, I HAD FAITH.



DOESN'T THE OUTCOME MATTER?



NOT WHEN IT COMES TO FAITH. THE OUTCOME IS THE FUTURE. FAITH IS THE PRESENT.



BUT I DON'T WANT TO REPEAT THE MISTAKES I'VE MADE IN THE PAST.



FAITH ISN'T ABOUT THE PAST. FAITH IS ALWAYS: **NOW**. WHEN WE MAKE A CHOICE WITH FAITH, IT'S AN INTERNAL CHOICE, A **CREATIVE CHOICE** - WE ARE ACTUALLY CREATING THE PRESENT MOMENT, **WITHOUT FEAR OF THE FUTURE OR REGRETS ABOUT THE PAST**.



**CREATING?**



YES! FAITH IS THE **BRIDGE** BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE. FAITH IS OUR ABILITY TO TRUST LIFE WHILE TAKING THE NEXT STEP: TO TRUST THAT WHEN WE REACH OUR HAND OUT, THE PERSON WILL RETURN OUR HANDSHAKE.

# Faith

## אמונה

A man must trust in his life, must believe in his physical materialistic abilities and his moral ethical strengths together. This trust encompasses everything like the feeling of love. The trust in life is a blessing from God just as the distrust of life is the most terrible curse—“And you shall have no faith in your life” (Deut. 28:66). When a man believes in his spiritual life, he finds satisfaction with the labors of his soul, and he continually grows and ascends.

האדם צריך להאמין בחייו, להאמין בכוחו החומרי ובכוחו המוסרי יחד. האמונה היא כוללת הכל כמו אהבה. האמונה בחיים היא ברכת ה' כמו שאי האמונה היא הקללה היותר איומה – “ולא תאמין בחיך”. כשאדם מאמין בחייו הרוחניים הוא מוצא קורת רוח בעמל נפשו והוא הולך ומתעלה.

– Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot HaEmuna*, Introduction

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“The people kept their distance but Moses approached the fog where God was” (Exodus 20:17)—When a person...wants to go in the ways of God, the attribute of judgment denounces that person and prevents him from going in God’s ways. It also places obstacles before him. Yet, God “is one who desires kindness” (Micah 7:18) and hides Himself, as it were, in this obstacle. Thus, someone who is wise will look at the obstacle and uncover within it the Creator, blessed be His name.... This is the explanation of the verse “The people kept their distance”—For when they saw the mist, the obstacle, they kept their distance. “But Moses approached”, into the obstacle, which is precisely where God was hidden.

“ויעמוד העם מרחוק ומשה ניגש אל הערפל אשר שם האלוהים” – כי מי... שרוצה לילך בדרכי השם יתברך אזי מידת הדין מקטרג עליו ואינו מניח אותו לילך בדרכי ה' יתברך ומזמין לו מניעה. וה' יתברך חפץ חסד הוא ומסתיר את עצמו כביכול במניעה הזאת. ומי שהוא בר דעת, הוא מסתכל במניעה ומוצא שם הבורא ברוך הוא. וזה פירוש הפסוק “ויעמוד העם מרחוק” – כי כשרואין הערפל, הינו המניעה, עומדין מרחק. “ומשה ניגש”, הינו אל המניעה, שבה בעצמה נסתר השם יתברך.

– Likutey Moharan I, 115

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On the verse “Today, if you hear His voice” (Ps. 95:7): this is a fundamental principle in the service of God: one should not consider but that [single] day. Just like in the pursuit of a livelihood and one’s needs, one must not focus on one day to the next, so too in the service of God, one must focus only on that day and that moment. Since in this world, a person has only the very day and very moment in which he finds himself as tomorrow is a completely different world.

(על הפסוק) “היום אם בקולו תשמעו” (תהילים צה:): זה כלל גדול בעבודת ה', שלא ישים לנגד עיניו כי אם אותו היום. הן בעסק פרנסה והצטרבותו צריך שלא יחשוב מיום לחברו. וכן בעבודתו יתברך לא ישים לנגד עיניו כי אם אותו היום ואותה השעה... כי אין לאדם בעולמו כי אם אותו היום ואותה השעה שעומד בו, כי יום המחרת הוא עולם אחר לגמרי.

– Likutey Moharan I, 272

How is faith an active experience? What do you have to do in order to have faith? Does faith have to be about God? How does what happens in your life affect your faith? And, really, what makes you think that the next time you reach out your hand to someone, they will shake it back?

Faith, while often used to describe religious belief, goes far beyond theology. At its core, faith is the ability to trust life while actively taking the next step. As opposed to sitting back and waiting for life to happen, we can choose to trust that life will educate us if we engage with it. Through this active engagement, faith allows us to connect to the present moment, and become a participant in creation itself.

### ① Ability to Trust Life While Taking the Next Step

People often define faith as believing in something even if you have no “proof.” Hanan’s father points him in a different direction, telling him that faith is really about trusting in life and taking active steps, an idea which echoes thousands of years of Jewish thought.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935, Latvia), a prominent 20th century rabbi commonly known as Rav Kook, comments on the ability to trust life:

A man must trust in his life, must believe in his physical materialistic abilities and his moral ethical strengths together.... When a man believes in his spiritual life, he finds satisfaction with the labors of his soul, and he continually grows and ascends.

*Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Orot HaEmuna, Introduction*

Hanan’s father speaks about the same idea:

**DADDY:** I never said that faith is about making sense. Faith is about **trust**. Faith is our ability to **trust life**.

1. What does it mean when Rav Kook and Daddy say you have to “trust life?” When has that been easy for you? When has it been challenging?
2. Like Rav Kook’s encouragement to believe in a person’s physical materialistic abilities, Daddy talks with Hanan about how believing in logic and science are not incompatible with faith. Is it easier for you to trust in concrete experiences, or more spiritual metaphysical experiences? Why do you think one feels more comfortable than the other?
3. Does trusting in life feel unpredictable? If so, does it hold you back from being able to do so wholeheartedly? Do you feel you have grown more when you have been able to trust in life the way Daddy suggests?

Hanan asks Daddy if “trusting life” means we’re supposed to simply “let whatever happens, happen.” Daddy counters:

**DADDY:** No! I never said faith was passive. On the contrary! Faith is active! That’s the point! Faith is experienced **through** life. It’s about **delving into** the **experience** of life.... Faith is our ability to trust life while taking the next step.

Judaism is an experiential religion which requires active “doing,” as opposed to simply “believing.” In order to identify as a Jew, one must engage with the *mitzvot* (מצוות, “commandments”), and while there are numerous ways to do so, a *mitzvah* is ultimately only fulfilled through action. Jewish concepts and ideas come to life through behavior. Similarly, Hanan’s father tells him that *faith* cannot be passive.

4. Do you find it is more exciting or more frightening to take next steps when you have no way of knowing what the outcome will be? How often do you do so? How does taking those steps feel like faith to you?
5. When have you “waited for something to happen,” and when have you “trusted life and taken the next step?” Which feels more comfortable to you?

### ② Letting Life Educate Us

When Daddy summarizes faith as the ability to trust life while taking the next step, Hanan becomes concerned:

**HANAN:** But what if things don’t work out the way I want in life? How am I supposed to have faith then?

**DADDY:** Faith is about letting life educate US, instead of trying to solve life in terms of what we expect life should be.

Judaism is rich with teachings about embracing what life throws at you. Life experiences, whether perceived as good or bad, are all opportunities to receive, grow, and learn.

“The people kept their distance but Moses approached the fog where God was” (*Exodus 20:17*)—When a person...wants to go in the ways of God, the attribute of judgment denounces that person and prevents them from going in God’s ways. It also places obstacles before them. Yet, God “is one who desires kindness” (*Micah 7:18*) and hides Himself, as it were, in this obstacle. Thus, someone who is wise will look at the obstacle and uncover within it the Creator, blessed be His name.... This is the explanation of the verse “The people kept their distance”—For when they saw the mist, the obstacle, they kept their distance. **“But Moses approached,” into the obstacle, which is precisely where God was hidden.**

*Likutey Moharan I, 115*

Why was he called Nachum of Gamzu? Because whatever befell him he would declare, “This too is for the best”

**Note:** *Gamzu* (גמזו) means “this too” in Hebrew.

*Taanit 21a*

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1. What happens when you try to solve life? Do you think people are more or less successful when they try to direct what happens in their lives? How does seeing something sacred in an obstacle feel different than trying to direct your life?
2. How frustrating is it when you think you will be able to change an outcome but can't? How does that differ from when you just "experience life," as Daddy says?
3. Sometimes life isn't so easy. What do you think about Nahum of Gamzu's way of living? How realistic is it to say that a person should see the good and the bad as equally beneficial? *Can you learn from everything?*
4. What are the best things you have learned through life? How have they strengthened your ability to experience faith? What is the difference between the hard and the easy experiences?
5. When obstacles come up in your life, how do they create opportunities to learn?

### ③ Faith is NOW. Connecting to and Creating the Present Moment

Ironically, while Hanan teaches Daddy about being present and the "reality of expectations" when it comes to being grateful (go watch You Can Dance, on the theme of Gratitude if you haven't!), it is hard for Hanan to understand a similar idea when it comes to faith. He needs Daddy to clearly explain that faith is not about what happens the "next time" or what has happened in the past, it is about connecting to (and participating in creating) the present moment.

Jewish teaching is filled with the idea that the ultimate spiritual experience can only come through connection to the present moment.

So he went to him [R. Joshua b. Levi went, on the instructions of Elijah the prophet, to meet the Messiah who was residing at the gates of Rome]....He asked: 'When will you come, Master?,' 'Today,' he [the Messiah] answered. On his [R. Joshua b. Levi] return to Elijah, Elijah enquired, 'What did he say to you?' — 'peace Upon thee, O son of Levi,' he [R. Joshua b. Levi] answered. Elijah observed, 'He thereby assured you and your father of [a portion in] the world to come.' 'He spoke falsely to me,' he [R. Joshua b. Levi] rejoined, 'stating that he would come today, but has not.' He [Elijah] answered him, 'This is what the Messiah said to you, "Today, if you will hear His voice" (Ps. 95:7).'

*Sanhedrin 98a*

But doesn't religion usually teach that it is all about what happens in the future? Where I will go when I die, based on what I did while I was here? Not Judaism. Judaism doesn't just say today is important, Judaism says it is the *most* important. Don't worry about the future. Connect with the present.

On the verse in Psalm 95 "Today, if you hear His voice" (Ps. 95:7). This is a fundamental principle in the service of God: one should not consider but that [single] day. Just like in the pursuit of a livelihood and one's needs, one must not focus on one day to the next, so too in the service of God, one must focus only on that day and that moment. Since in this world, a person has only the very day and very moment in which he finds himself as tomorrow is a completely different world.

*Likutey Moharan I, 272*

1. Why do you think Judaism places such importance on the present moment? Do you agree that faith is about being in the present moment?
2. When do you find yourself losing the ability to stay rooted in the present? What kinds of things pull you away from being in the "now?"

Daddy also talks about how connecting to the present moment, through faith, allows us to become participants in creation itself:

**DADDY:** When we make a choice with faith, it's an **internal** choice, a **creative** choice - we are actually **creating the present moment**, WITHOUT fear of the future or regrets about the past.

The application of this teaching is elucidated in *Sichot HaRan*, a compilation of texts from Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772 – 1810, Ukraine), in which Rabbi Nachman illustrates how obsessing over mistakes in the past can prevent a person from creating a new life in the present:

"The wicked are filled with regrets" (based on *Nedarim 9b*). Man's obsession with his past errors prevents him from being free and open to the changes and his ability to correct in the present. The mistake focuses us on who we once were; and as such, it exists in our lives as a substitute for responsibility and a rejection of renewal and freedom [in our lives].

*Adapted interpretation of Sichot HaRan 10 by Tali Kahana*

3. How often do past successes or failures affect your present choices? And, how often do your present choices change depending on what you think might happen in the future? Do you see any benefits to focusing on the past or future?
4. What do you think Daddy means when he talks about "creating the present moment?" How does Rabbi Nachman's quote strengthen the concept of "creating the present moment?"
5. How much of what happens in your life do you think is happening "to you," and how much are you "creating?" How does your personal concept of God fit into this balance, and how does this relate to faith?



Top: **Installation Shot of Hanan Harchol: Jewish Food For Thought**  
(View from inside Joseph Gallery)

2013, Graphic Novel and Jewish Text Tapestry  
6.5 feet x 5 feet and 6 feet x 2 feet (respectively)  
archival print on canvas

Right: **Faith**, 2013, 6 feet x 5 feet, acrylic on canvas



# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Artist Biography

Hanan Harchol is a multimedia visual artist, born in Israel, who moved to the U.S. as a child. Harchol creates paintings, drawings, animations, videos, and multimedia installations that use family narratives to explore the human condition, in particular, the application of Jewish teachings to contemporary life.

Harchol earned a Master of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Highest Honors from Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University. He received a 1998 New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship, and The Foundation for Jewish Culture's Ronnie Heyman Prize in 2004. Harchol was awarded a 2011 Covenant Foundation three-year Signature Grant to create *Jewish Food For Thought*, an animated series that incorporates Jewish wisdom into engaging and thought-provoking animated dialogues between Harchol and his parents. Harchol's work has been published in *Jewish Art In America: An Introduction* by Matthew Baigell, and reviewed in *ARTnews*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Jewish Week*.

Harchol has exhibited extensively in museums and galleries across the country, including The Chicago Cultural Center; the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York; and the Jersey City Museum. His films and animations have been broadcast on Channel 13 (WNET), Jewish Life Television, Shalom TV, and in nearly 100 film festivals worldwide, including The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, The New York Jewish Film Festival at Lincoln Center, The Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film, Anifest International Festival of Animated Films in the Czech Republic, The Barcelona Jewish Film Festival, and The Brooklyn International Film Festival at The Brooklyn Museum. Harchol has also presented his series *Jewish Food For Thought* at the General Assembly of Jewish Federations of North America, The Union for Reform Judaism Biennial, and at Limmud UK, Limmud NY, and Limmud LA. Harchol's solo museum exhibition at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, documented in this catalogue and commentary, will subsequently travel across North America. Harchol is also a professional classical guitarist, broadcast on WQXR, New York, with nine CD releases.

# Credits

*Jewish Food For Thought: The Animated Series* was created with generous funding by **The Covenant Foundation**, with fiscal sponsorship by **The Foundation for Jewish Culture**.

This exhibition, catalogue and commentary were produced with the generous support of **The Covenant Foundation**.

This exhibition is presented by the **Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Center for Jewish Learning and Culture**

at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, with the support of **George, z”l, and Mildred Weissman**.

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[www.huc.edu/museums/ny](http://www.huc.edu/museums/ny)

Exhibition Design/Installation: Brian Zegeer

Catalogue Design and Creative Director: Hanan Harchol

Graphic Design and Layout: Hanan Harchol

Editorial Assistant: Claire Solomon

Photography: Salem Krieger

Graphic Design Assistant: Ian Pasetzky

Hebrew Translation and Text Consultant: Tuvia Brander

All animations written, drawn, and animated by Hanan Harchol (Harchol impersonated his parents’ voices in the animations)

All paintings and drawings in this catalogue are by Hanan Harchol.

Study Guides written by Rabbi Leora Kaye.

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[www.JewishFoodForThought.com](http://www.JewishFoodForThought.com)

**From artist Hanan Harchol, creator and writer of *Jewish Food For Thought: The Animated Series*:**

*I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to **The Covenant Foundation** for making this project possible and in particular to Harlene Appelman and Joni Blinderman who have played such an important part in my creative process, guiding me and supporting me in a way that has touched me deeply, both as an artist and as a human being. Thank you also to Jeanie Rosensaft and Laura Kruger for believing in my work and granting me this exhibition, and to Rabbi Leora Kaye for the outstanding study guides. My deepest gratitude to my mentor, Professor Judith K. Brodsky, who encouraged me to continue making artwork about my father, explaining, “Everyone has a father.” Finally, I would like to thank my teachers of Jewish wisdom for their patience, brilliance, and kindness in helping me navigate the chochma:*

Maoz and Tali Kahana, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Rabbi Abraham Twerski, Joe Septimus, William Berkson, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Rabbi Ben Tzion Krasnianski, Rabbi Simkha Weintraub, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rabbi Harlan Wechsler, Rabbi David Aaron, Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, Rabbi Tzvi Sytner, Nechama Leibowitz, Rabbi Yaakov Salomon, Viktor Frankl, Rabbi Yaakov Jacob Pollak, Gilah Kletenik, Rabbi Elie Weinstock, Sara Rosen, Shilo Kramer, Rabbi Alexander Kaye, Rabbi Leon Morris, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, Rabbi Leora Kaye, Ruth Calderon, Rabbi Yossi Korngold, Rabbi Scott Bolton, Gary Shaffer, Rabbi David Rabhan, The Kotzker Rabbi, Hillel the Elder, Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides, The Baal Shem Tov

*Thank you to the following for their guidance and support:*

Harlene Appelman, Joni Blinderman, Elise Bernhardt, Marion Dienstag, Judy Brodsky, Laura Kruger, Professor Matthew Baigell, Aviva Weintraub, Rabbi Leon Morris, Jean Bloch Rosensaft, Claire Solomon, Tuvia Brander, Neil Kittredge, Mark Cohen, Sarah Jane Lapp, Lou Borella, Will Jacobs, my mother and father, my wife and son.



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The animations on this DVD may also be viewed at [www.JewishFoodForThought.com](http://www.JewishFoodForThought.com)

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ISBN: 1-884300-50-2



Printed in the United States of America in 2013 by  
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion  
Brookdale Center, One West Fourth Street  
New York, NY 10012-1186

