



THE
Teshuvah
PRINCIPLE

Learning to Turn
from **Darkness** to **Light**

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from **Darkness** to **Light**

Susan J. Shaw, PhD, MDiv

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Dedicated to my sister in the blood of the
Lamb. Carol Ann Siefker.
who taught me the meaning of 1 Corinthians 13.
and without whom
this book could not have been written!

If I speak in the tongues of people or of angels,
but do not have love,
I am only a resounding gong,
or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and
can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge,
and if I have a faith that can move mountains,
but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor
and give over my body to hardship
that I may boast, but do not have love,
I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind.
It does not envy,
it does not boast, it is not proud.
It does not dishonor others,
it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil
but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts,
always hopes, always perseveres.
Love never fails.

But where there are prophecies, they will cease;
where there are tongues, they will be stilled;
where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
but when completeness comes,
what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became an adult,
I put the ways of childhood behind me.
For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13

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Foreword

IT WAS NOT LONG AGO that I contacted my good friend, Dr. Susan Shaw, to assess her interest in writing a book with me, something we had always hoped to accomplish. Several topics of mutual interest were discussed, and although we had the greatest of intentions, life seemed to get in the way of accomplishing such a project.

That phone call was not entirely unfruitful, however, because it planted a seed in Susan's heart, which matured into a burning concept worthy of putting pen to paper. Months later, when I contacted her again, she shared with me the concept behind The *Teshuvah* Principle. I sensed the excitement in her voice and encouraged the quick completion of the work.

Dr. Shaw's book is about transformation, the great *teshuvah* principle of turning one's heart, mind, and soul toward what is good and what is of God. Turning isn't always easy, but it is always

necessary to experiencing God in deeper and more meaningful ways. Transformation is the heartbeat of Christianity and Dr. Shaw's excitement is rightfully placed.

I have known Susan for well over twenty years, ever since our initial days together in Christian higher education. She has been a dear friend to me and my family and she possesses the ability to think critically, understand broadly, and impart wisdom directly.

May her book be a soothing balm for your soul and lead you into deeper waters of faith.

T. S. Wise, DMin, PhD, JD
Pastor, Educator, Leader

Prologue

I HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO WRITE this book based upon my many years as a professional educator, parent, businesswoman, and student. I have spent a good deal of time, in particular, as a student of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments.

It was actually the advice I offered a colleague that prompted me to undertake this project in earnest. I suggested that he write as if he had just been handed a microphone and would have only this one opportunity to speak his mind and deliver his message to the world.

As I complete my seventy-fifth year of life, I realize that I, too, need to hold the microphone and speak my mind about what I consider to be the most important message I could deliver to the world. It is my hope that by stating my conclusions, others may come to seek to reform and transform their lives through the application of what I call The *Teshuvah* Principle.

This life principle of redemptive and transformative restoration is a summation of the Christ-message, which is to “repent and be saved.” It is this idea of turning away from that which brings darkness to the place that brings light—that is the theme of this book and will hopefully serve as a guide to facilitate the process of making momentous changes in one’s life.

It is my hope that at least some might come to better know the presence of God in daily living, to increase their critical thinking capabilities, to improve their communication skills, and to explore new and innovative approaches to relationship—both with God and with others.

The goal is to have us turn (*teshuvah*) from the darkness that surreptitiously resides within our hearts and minds, in the direction of the light of redemption and salvation that shines out from the life of Christ. The *imago dei* (image of God) that resides within us all, regardless of gender, skin color, or affiliation, challenges us to be open to the call to turn from the direction of the Gospel’s “wide gate of destruction,” toward the direction of the “narrow gate of life,” that leads to redemption and eternal life with the Lord of the universe.

Salvation and redemption are the gift of God and may not be bought, bargained for, nor demanded. It is a familiarity with, and adoption of, the Christ-like life that enables us to identify the

full human potential that a Christ-like life fosters, both in the realm where we live and have our material being, and in the realm of the heavenlies, where we hope to dwell forever with the essence of being (*JHVH*).

In the interest of transparency, it should be said that I identify as a Messianic Jew. A Messianic Jew is one who was born into some stripe of Jewish heritage, but who has “confessed the name” and “bent the knee,” in assent and affirmation to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and Savior of the world.

And, I can attest, indeed, to the fact that He has surely been a Savior to me!

As an outgrowth of the faith that convicted me of God’s miraculous work in my life, Multiple Ministries, Inc. was formed in the 1980s, as a not-for-profit corporation. Designed to serve as a vehicle for people of faith to express and share their core values and beliefs about life and living, the ministry seeks to engage in, and encourage, dialogue and discussion about the important matters of life, and maintains a website at www.multipleministries.net.

As an aside, it might be helpful, but it is certainly not necessary, to have a written or digital Bible as a ready reference when reading, in order to allow for easy access to check each passage cited. As well, having the entire Biblical chapter or verse available may encourage further investigation into the context in which the citation is to be found.

The Scripture verses quoted and cited in this book come exclusively from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.

Otherwise, it is with a prayer in my mind, and love in my heart, that I submit what I have learned about life and living and the many ways that life can get in the way of living—for better or for worse—as we too often zig when we had intended to zag. Ultimately, those who would repent and be saved are written in the Lamb's Book of Life as directed by the Lord, God, Almighty.

It is to that incredible source of power that we look for a loving life, and a life lived abundantly and pleasing to God. In the end, may we all receive the blessed commendation that we have done well as good and faithful servants.

Introduction

MOST PEOPLE, WHEN ASKED, WILL tell you that the basic nature of humanity is good, that people mean well, and that they want to be nice to each other.

In fact, Harold Kushner, a contemporary Jewish Rabbi, wrote a best-selling book in 1981, called, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, in which he argued, among other things, that the reason for human inhumanity to humanity and the awful existence of human suffering, is due to the fact that God is limited by the laws of nature, the evolution of humanity, and unlimited, human moral freedom.

According to Kushner, God is simply unable to prevent incredibly bad things from happening to seemingly good people.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that Rabbi Kushner would come to draw such conclusions in the 1980s, after God had been pro-

nounced dead by some German philosophers like George Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche in the 1800s long before. It was the Age of Enlightenment that fueled the birth of new and anarchic ideas that wanted to disprove the authority of both State and Church.

The product of such prevailing nihilistic and atheistic ideas were theories and philosophies that ran in any number of directions thereafter, until rabbis, like Rabbi Kushner, feel perfectly justified in the present day, to believe that we worship an imperfect God and therefore remain victim to our own limitless possibilities and the unruly world in which we live.

And it is indeed true that the world in which we live can be not only dark and difficult in terms of the physical calamities that plague earth in the form of hurricanes, tornadoes, cyclones and a whole host of other physical phenomena, but also in the psychic calamities that erupt between human beings and destroy lives in too many ways to count.

We hear daily of unimaginable atrocities not only on the killing fields, but in alleys and bedrooms, in schools and in churches and synagogues. We read staggering statistics of criminality, abuse, and depravity. We learn of children starved by their parents and wives murdered by their husbands. We hear gruesome stories of human trafficking and the

abominable ways in which human beings treat one another.

Digital, print, and published broadcasts offer rattling catalogues of torture, death, and destruction. Prime time cartoons, movies, and commercials feature hundreds of acts of violence in just a few moments of time. The circuits of information technology bulge with details of the latest kidnappings, murder and molestation of babies, and scandals within houses of worship, the congress, the media, and the workplace. The Internet is endlessly aglow with interactions of human depravity and deceit and every imaginable wickedness.

Left to our own devices, not at all unlike William Golding's lost boys in *Lord of the Flies*, our baser natures reveal themselves in the most detestable of ways.

Chapter One

Looking Back

IN OUR HEADS WE SCREAM, how can this be? How can human beings inflict such miseries upon one another, whether adult or child? How is it possible for human beings to be so insensitive to one another?

There were other times in Biblical history, according to the written accounts, when human depravity had grown so great, that God, Himself, could tolerate human behavior no longer. We find two particular tellings in the Old Testament in the very first Book of Genesis, about calamities that befell humankind when disobedience ran its course.

The first is the account of Noah, a man described as “righteous, blameless, and faithful.” In the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis, God told

Noah that the whole population of earth was “corrupt in God’s sight and full of violence,” and that He was going to “put an end to all people, for the earth was filled with violence because of them.”

The result of that prediction was The Flood which came about when “all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens opened,” when rain fell on the earth “forty days and forty nights.”

And, as if once were not enough for God to send a stern message of disapproval to His people about their indifferent behavior, we read in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Genesis, that some four-hundred years later, God had a conversation with Abraham, another man described as “righteous and faithful,” about the destruction of the kingdom-nations of Sodom and Gomorrah, that had come to flourish in the lands of Canaan, located in the Middle East.

God told Abraham that, “I have heard many complaints against the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are very evil. I will go down and see if they are as bad as I have heard. If not, I will know.”

Abraham, destined to be the “Father” of “all nations,” rose to the defense of nations he did not know, contending with God over the exact number of “good people” it would take to hold God back from enforcing His impending destruction.

The agreed number of “good people” who had to be found was ten.

Once Abraham’s relative, Lot, and his family, were removed from the doomed cities, not even ten other people of faith could be found, and God “rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.”

Incredibly, Lot’s wife, although instructed to focus on what lay ahead and not behind, looked back at the massive inferno, and famously became a pillar of salt. Even in the face of imminent destruction and disaster, some are unwilling and unable to leave behind that which is evil and knowingly risk death, lacking the faith necessary to do as told.

INSIDE OUT

We can hardly walk away from it all, both the ancient and the contemporary, and continue to believe that we, as a human race, are the nicest of folks. We can hardly pretend that we are humanitarians at our core. We can hardly point fingers at the defects in one another, denying our own petty cruelties!

Looking from where we have come to where we are now, the similarities in our contempt for the spiritual and our refusal to consider God’s instructions on how to live lives characterized by love and peace, are striking. In the modern age, we are

so conditioned to the idea that we are independent godlike creatures who have pure hearts, minds, and spirits, that the idea of personal imperfection and personal responsibility is abhorrent. It is only the circumstance surrounding birth and upbringing that turns us from nice to naughty.

This pervasive concept of “victimology” in our sociology and psychology has enabled us to remove all personal blame and responsibility for ourselves to others, and most especially, to the super-villain, God. With God having been condemned for indifference and effectively removed from the civic equation, the notion of an authoritarian, male-imagined, super-power God, has largely been tossed out the window, not only in the secular world, but quite often in the sacred world as well.

How is it, it is put, that an all-loving, all-merciful God, could punish and torture those He loves? What proof exists in the scientific age that a Higher Power exists, other than what we can see through our telescopes and microscopes?

Most want to shrink from the idea that our own hearts and minds might be the primary location for treachery and deceit. To examine our hearts and minds is not a project willingly undertaken. The pursuit of personal discoveries of our true nature and the fallout that may occur from those discoveries, does not win friends and influence people,

and demands that we forego the facades we have established to mask our blemished souls.

However, an examination of what the ancient Biblical texts and some modern scientific theories have to say about the intrinsic goodness of human beings, will not only confirm that human beings are not inherently “good,” but will reveal that our worldview and all that we say and do is largely conditioned by the color of the glasses that we wear in order to better see the world in which we live and have our being.

REALITY CHECK

It is not possible to undertake a study of human nature without a recognition of the existence of what some have labeled, “The Presuppositional Grid.” The Presuppositional Grid is the filter through which we process any and all information we receive, no matter the source of input. We are the sum and substance of the world into which we have been born and in which we find ourselves to be living.

This Presuppositional Grid is constructed by the intersection of a myriad of factors which cannot be changed or controlled. For instance, our height, our ethnicity, our number in the family order, the region into which we were born, and the color of our eyes.

Some elements of this pre-determination of who and what we are, are governed by a genetic code that determines every microscopic facet of our bodily functions. Others are the result of the “happencance” of time and place and the exposure we are given to much or little, happy or sad, healthy or sick.

The discussions and research that have been undertaken around the importance of “eugenics” (genetic inheritance), versus the importance of “euthenics” (environmental setting), in terms of what contributes most to our sense of self, will forever rage in all the academic and scientific disciplines that undertake the study—and there are many.

And, no wonder, since the better we know ourselves, the better we function.

Nonetheless, the circumstances of birth, including everything from gender to parental age, to cold or warm climate, will influence all that we think, say, and do. Without a concerted effort to overcome the subliminal messages that bombard us daily at home, we will ultimately be the product of the earliest input from the smell of bacon frying to being the baby of the family.

This is why for all, “perception is reality.”

Every person’s “reality” is the product of where s/he has been, how s/he got there, and the coping mechanisms that s/he has developed in order to get him or her through the day. The ways in which we

process the information we receive from others in the family unit and from those with whom we engage on the outside, will have largely to do with the darkened, opaque, or rose-colored glasses we wear that have been determined by the realities we claim as inalienable.

We cannot escape the physical and psychic individuals we have become. We hear what we want to hear the way we want to hear it based upon our genetic disposition and all the previous experience and exposure we have had.

And, further, science has definitely determined that all human beings speak a silent language to one another in the form of “body language.” This language, which Dr. Julius Fast explored and explained in his book, *Body Language*, in the 1970s, makes clear the fact that some sixty percent of our messages to one another are coded and encoded in ongoing verbal cues and signals that we make on a moment to moment basis with little or no knowledge or effort.

These non-verbal cues include the most basic and innocuous of messages about who and what we are as indicated by the colors we choose to wear, the way in which we fix our hair, the style of our clothes and shoes, or the number of times we blink our eyes as we speak. We read these unintended messages from one another in some mere matter

of seconds and form fairly strong opinions about others from them—for better or for worse.

The next thirty percent of the interactive cues and signals we send to one another are bound up in our voice-tone—our pitch and our volume and the actual sound of our voice. The tiny ten-percent that remains of the one-hundred percent of the content of the messages we send to one another, is to be found in the actual words, themselves, that we speak.

All of which is to say that, the critical lesson to be learned from this science is that it is never “what” we say, but “how” we say it, that determines whether or not we will actually be heard and understood.

To pretend that we can shut ourselves off from these profound unknowable and imperceptible influences, is to pretend that we are genuinely impartial regarding our view of the world and how human beings work. Our past and our present greatly influence how we think and act, and while education and practice help to create neutrality and impartiality in our thinking, we are nonetheless never fully able to elude who we are, how we appear, and what we think.

In fact, total neutrality and impartiality are nearly impossible.

This filtering, Presuppositional Grid, must be considered when accepting information from any

source (including the author's). Anyone giving information to anyone else is always evaluating ideas and concepts through his or her own personal lens. Everyone colors and slants information based upon the input they, themselves, have received, both internally, and externally.

Knowing that our present cannot escape our past should remind us that we are likely to be judged with the same prescriptive filters that color our judgment of others, thus underlining the Biblical injunction in the Book of Matthew that, we “judge not, lest we be judged.”