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Orientation

What This Book is Not

THIS IS NOT A “FEEL GOOD” BOOK. If you’re looking for a momentary lift, a collection of inspiring quotes that make you smile as you sit by the fire, warming your heart as you warm your feet, then... this is *not* the book for you.

This book is upfront and direct. The style caters to those interested in a frank exploration of the soul and metaphysical health so that certain goals outlined here can be achieved. This may seem confrontational as some of the contents will challenge conventional wisdom and your own personal world view.

However you interpret the tone, the intention is solely to carve a path to clarity. Those truly in search of clarity will be strong enough to endure the rocky road on which this book will lead them. Inevitably there will be those who find themselves on the defensive. I welcome your comments and your challenges.¹

If you still do want that instant fuzzy feeling you get from a golden sunset or a teary movie on the Hallmark Channel, please put this book down and pick up some achiever’s story of hope and inspiration that leads him or her to resounding happiness and success in life; a story you can read while on your treadmill burning calories. And after you turn off the treadmill you can take the message with you forever, or perhaps for the next day or two before you pick up the next achiever’s book for your treadmill.

This book seeks to avoid the quick fix, the cosmetic solution that looks good yet does not penetrate; merely fades as quickly as it comes. What I am trying to say, if not yet clear, is that unfortunately our society tends toward the superficial thrill to satisfy spiritual thirst; a sensation that tickles you pink, makes you gush, cry, and clench your fists into iron-willed champions as you chant, “Yeah, yeah—I can do it,” all the while spurred on by friends and family as cheering spectators whispering in your ear, “I believe in you. I believe in you....”

Meanwhile, of course, you haven’t much changed your life at all.

¹See full contact information on page 174.

The Right Fit

Let me tell you a secret—I know how that sounds, but just give me a chance. This is something you’ve long known about yet perhaps haven’t clearly articulated: *Genuine spiritual contentment does not come in a party packet.* You cannot buy such contentment off the shelves, no matter how much you are willing to pay. You cannot do it in your spare time on the subway to work. You cannot take a class in it once a week for an hour. You cannot reserve it for a special occasion such as sitting around a cozy campfire, eyes searching the stars. Nor can you condense it into bright and glossy bumper stickers that champion your enlightenment.

A fleeting indulgence on your part in an undemanding, neatly tailored spiritual experience may have its appeal; but on closer inspection you’ll discover that all you have accomplished is squeezing some aspect of spirituality into your schedule. Your daily life remains dominated by your normal essential activities; your spiritual life is a minor adventure on the side. Even if inspiring, motivating and enervating, your spirituality remains an outside source that you sometimes tap into. The bottom line: your spirituality is convenient because it doesn’t much interfere with your life.

The Soul Diet is going to expect you to let spirituality interfere with your life. *You will no longer try to fit spirituality into your life, you will try to fit your life into spirituality.* I know this book is slim and that there are limits to its scope, but I will try to create a personal guide to the monumental task of real spiritual change, the kind of change – a transformation to metaphysical health – that helps you fit your life into spirituality.

A Dictionary Definition, Please

What exactly is metaphysical health? Well, it’s one of those definitions that takes a book to explain. We’d have to tackle the basics first before gaining a comprehensive understanding of metaphysical health. We’d need to define the soul and what it means to go on a Soul Diet. We’d need to understand what is detrimental to the soul and what elevates the soul. We’d need to understand how our character traits influence the soul, and how our approach to internal battles and challenges shape the soul. Such elements require serious investigation and this book pursues that objective. Not exactly a piece of cake. *But* if you’re standing on one leg and would like a telegram-definition of metaphysical health we could, before going any further, describe it as follows:

The process of eliminating clutter in order to make the right choices.

Since such a telegram might seem vague to you now, I recommend standing on both legs so that we can explore metaphysical health more thoroughly. And thorough it’s going to be, with the proverbial blood, sweat and tears and a few gasps thrown in for good measure. I know I am beginning to sound like a drill sergeant, yet I also realize that even if it requires some hard work there are people reading this text who are sufficiently disillusioned with the standard party-packet spirituality favors that they are eager to ditch these candies for a more profound guide to change.

By the way, on your hunt for true spirituality, bear in mind that any doctrine that seems so easy and comfortable that it snuggles right into your life probably belongs to the party packet, like those emails you get about making millions while working at home.

One hopes that some of us are a little wiser now about such promises. Making millions has never been easy and never will be. Of course it's not impossible to make millions, but there's no easy alternative to hard work. It's inevitable.

Similarly, this program requires commitment and serious effort toward effecting change. You are not going to get away with calling your mystic in the morning and taking, as directed, two spiritual tablets.

Thus, once again, if you think this sounds too harsh, too heavy or too holistic for you, please put the book down. I know that doesn't do much for my marketing strategy but I really do want the right kind of person to be reading this book. You have to be ready to go on *The Soul Diet*.

Confronting Yourself

The essence of the change you will encounter in this book is internal. Part of being ready to go on the diet is the willingness to take the plunge and confront your inner self head on. This is a mighty but doable—challenge. If there's something lacking or wrong inside us, it is near instinctual to ascribe this to outside factors:

- The reason I get angry often is because people provoke me.
- The reason I have this empty feeling inside is because nobody or nothing around me inspires me.
- The reason I lack willpower is because my parents did not educate or discipline me properly.
- The reason I am dissatisfied in life is because I don't have enough money.
- The reason I have been unsuccessful in life is because nothing has gone my way.

As the years pass, our faulty reasoning evolves into the undisputed truth, curious ideas pretty much at home in the contours of our minds. As long as we don't shine a spotlight on this illusionary thinking it will by and large escape scrutiny, nestling there quite content with the status quo. That is why an attempt to brush away the cobwebs and stare ourselves down is commonly met with resistance and even panic. In fact we are often deathly afraid – I am not exaggerating – of facing ourselves head on. It calls for a scrupulous evaluation of our character and generally we run for cover rather than stand to the test.

Thus Rabbi Yisroel Salanter², the famous progenitor of an ethical movement called *Mussar*, declared it more difficult to change one character trait than to learn the entire Talmud.

² Rabbi Yisroel Lipkin of Salant (1809–1883).

This brings me to another essential point in introducing this book:

As a rabbi, most of my sources are Torah based, culled from the ancient authoritative commentaries as well as the contemporary ones. Some sources listed in the footnotes are available only in Hebrew since they are for a very specialized market. Some are even printed in a special style of text that differs from the modern Hebrew standard. Thus most of what I am saying is not my own thought; I just happened to collate the material in a format accessible to the average reader, Jew or non-Jew. Although the material is Torah-based, the wisdom imparted in this book is suitable for people of all creeds or caliber. This book will not require you to do anything typically Jewish; you will not even be expected to eat bagels and lox every Sunday morning.

So, now I will try to answer some questions and reservations that may be swimming around in your head:

Q: What if I don't know what the Torah is?

A: It doesn't matter. Even after reading this book, you won't know what the Torah is. (Does that comfort you?) Just take the information and use it.

Q: But what if I don't believe in the Torah or even in God?

A: OK, a little more complex. Put it this way: If you are 100% sure that you don't believe in it, how will you ever trust my sources? So, again, put this book down. This is the third time I have told you to do it. Listen to me already! If, however, you rate yourself as less than 100% sure that you don't believe in it, then you have nothing to lose by reading on.

Q: What if I want to convert to Judaism after reading this book?

A: Please, don't be ridiculous.

The Power to Create and Destroy

As noted, this program is directed to people of all walks of life. What makes it so universal? What all people in the world share is that they are created in the Divine Image. Now what does that mean? Some insight is provided by the *Nefesh HaChaim*.³ (Don't worry about trying to pronounce these words. Of course, that's probably like telling you not to think about pink elephants.)

Being created in the Divine Image means that we are all endowed with a microcosm of God's capabilities. Even though we are by no means infinite or omniscient, there is a miniscule element of God's capabilities programmed inside us. Just as God has the power to create and to destroy, so, too, on a much smaller scale, we have the power to create and to destroy, both through action and through speech.⁴ This concept requires clarification. When I say we have the power to create, I am

³ Literally *The Soul of Life*, a classic philosophical work written by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749–1821).

⁴ The subject of speech is a principle element in this program and is given fuller treatment in chapter 9.

not necessarily referring to fulfilling any dream that pops into our head. Sometimes fulfilling our dreams is actually destructive, not creative.

If you think, for example, that the power to create means the drive to make millions of dollars, the thought is not necessarily true for many possible reasons. If a sixteen hour day is required to make those millions (so that your family will eventually be better off?) that could do considerably more damage than you imagine. Children who have a “customer service” relationship with their parents i.e. “have a good day” and “have a good night,” have suffered more than any amount of money can make up for. What is viewed as creative, therefore, can effectively be destructive. Thus, we introduce the concept of not letting our hearts lead us down the garden path, which we will develop further in the next chapter.

Discretion and guidance are needed to help us evaluate the truly creative and the truly destructive. The right kind of creativity elevates the soul. The wrong kind degrades the soul. As you make your way through this book, you will notice that this insight forms the broader basis for all the various steps you’ll need to get closer to metaphysical health. Although the steps seem unique and independent of each other, in actuality they are all expressions of one underlying theme—making sure you choose the right kind of creativity. You will discover that *The Soul Diet* will direct you along the path of the right kind of creativity so that your soul is elevated—not degraded—through your actions. You will discover how this diet provides you with breathtaking clarity, an unprecedented bird’s-eye-view of your self and your challenges. With this book you will take great pleasure in rising above the confusion wrought by contemporary pseudo-wisdom. You will learn how to gain the confidence to know what’s right for you, to know what’s good for you, and to know what direction you need to take. Above all you will learn how to maintain and sustain this level of clarity in your everyday life, no matter what happens. Yes, it is a long and challenging path but the reward is certainly immeasurable.