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To Renata, my beloved and treasure, for her love, her encouragement, her patience, and her faithfulness, without which this book would not have been written.

To Eliel and Dael, the precious jewels and the surprise joy of our lives.

To my mother and father, for the gift of life, and for all their blessings given.

And to Him who is the Mystery of all mysteries, the Giver of all gifts, and the Gift behind them all.

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THE BEGINNING

WHO ARE YOU?" I asked.
"A teacher," he replied.

"A teacher of what?"

"Mysteries."

"And where do you teach?"

"Here."

"In the desert?"

"What better place to find the truth with no distractions?"

"In a school?"

"Some would call it that," he replied.

"And who are your students?"

"Seekers of truth."

"How do they know to come . . . to the desert?"

"Word of mouth . . . an encounter, if it's meant to be. It just happens in the encounter . . . as in this one."

"As in this encounter?"

"If it's meant to be."

"And where do your students live?"

"There are many accommodations."

"Dorms?"

"That might be stretching it," he replied. "Rooms, dwelling places, chambers."

"And how much does it cost to . . ."

"Attend?"

"Yes."

"It doesn't."

"How is that possible?"

"If one is truly seeking, it's provided for."

"Really?"

"Come," he said.

"To the school?"

"Come and you'll see."

"I can't," I said. "I'm in the middle of a kind of journey."

"Through a Middle Eastern desert?" he said.

"Yes."

"And what exactly were you expecting to find?"

"Nothing, just . . ."

"You're on a journey to find nothing?"

"I like to travel."

“With no destination?”
“Not in particular.”
“But what if there was a destination?”
“What do you mean?”
“What if there was something you were meant to find?”
“Like what?”
“Come and you’ll see. The new year’s about to begin. It’s a good time to start.”
“To start?”
“The new course. The course I teach starts with the new year and ends at the year’s end.”
“I can’t.”
“Of course you can,” he said.
“I mean, I don’t know that I would.”
“You will,” he said, “if it’s meant to be.”

That’s how it all began, an unplanned encounter in the middle of a desert. I don’t know which was more absurd, what he told me about his “school” or the fact that I actually ended up there as one of his students. And I can’t say exactly what it was that led me to take that step. Perhaps it was the thought that if I didn’t do it, I would always wonder what it would have been like to have done so and regret having not taken the chance.

Nothing about the school was ordinary. The accommodations were sparse as one would expect considering the location. And yet it didn’t seem to matter, not to any of the students. They came from all walks of life and from a wide variety of places.

It wasn’t entirely barren. There were carefully maintained gardens of trees, plants, vines, and flowers. And then there were the people who lived in the surrounding region, the nomads, the shepherds, the many desert dwellers who lived in the tent encampments or tent villages that dotted the arid landscape. About an hour’s walk from the school was a small city. On occasion I would go there, as would others from the school, to purchase goods, to observe, and, when appropriate, to seek to apply the lessons given.

The school had other classes and teachers, but he was clearly preeminent and the one who oversaw everything else. He was so preeminent that he was known simply as “the teacher.” All the more reason I could never understand why he chose me as one of his students.

He lived a simple, ascetic life, as did everyone at the school. It was in keeping

with the goal of eliminating all distractions. We drew our water from a well, and at night the school was lit up with candles and oil lamps. It was as if we were all transported back to ancient times. And yet, at the same time, the teacher seemed very much aware of what was going on in the larger world from which the school seemed so cut off. Nor was he averse to making use of any tool or service of the modern world that would serve the purposes of the teachings.

As for the teachings themselves, they were no less ordinary than the school in which they were given. Most of the classes I was given consisted of just me and the teacher. There was no set time or place. They could take place early in the morning, in the middle of the day, or late at night and in desert plains, on mountaintops, on hills, in oil-lit chambers, while overlooking one of the tent villages, or while journeying through the desert on camels. There were times when the teaching would be triggered or initiated by the surroundings or by something we happened to see, or at least it seemed that way. I could never quite tell if the teaching was based on the surroundings or the surroundings on the teaching. And there were some teachings that came about in response to one of my questions. Each teaching would impart a mystery or truth. Some mysteries would build upon other mysteries or together form a larger mystery. At the end of each teaching he would give me an assignment, a mission to apply what I learned to my life that day.

I kept a journal in which I wrote down what he taught me and our conversations as best I could remember them—the teachings, the mysteries, the questions and answers, and the references I was able to find later on that matched up with what he shared. So by the end of the course and the year I had recorded three hundred sixty-five mysteries, one for each day of the year, a teaching, a mystery, and a mission.

The following is the record of what I was shown by the teacher, the mysteries he imparted, as I received them in the year I dwelt in the desert.



INFINITY IN A JAR

IT WAS MORNING. The teacher came to my room holding a little clay jar.

“A question,” he said. “Can that which is little contain that which is big?”

“No,” I answered.

“Can that which is finite encompass that which is infinite?”

“No,” I said again.

“But it can,” he replied.

“How?”

He lifted the jar and removed the cap from its top.

“It can,” he said. “It can if it’s an open vessel. A closed vessel can never contain anything larger than its own size. But an open vessel has no limitations. It now can contain the blowing of the wind or the outpouring of the rain. It could even contain the flowing of a river.”

“It would take a long time to contain a river.”

“It could take forever, but the principle is the same.”

“And the reason you’re showing me this . . .”

“Which is larger, that which you know or that which you don’t know?”

“That which I don’t know, I would think.”

“So then, it’s only wise that you seek that which you don’t know.”

“I guess.”

“But how do you contain that which is bigger than you . . . that which is bigger than your ability to comprehend?”

“By becoming an open vessel,” I said.

“Yes,” said the teacher. “Only by opening yourself up can you come to know that which you don’t already know. And only by becoming an open vessel can you contain that which is greater than yourself. The truth is always greater than our knowing. Your mind and heart are finite, clay jars. But the truth has no end. God has no end. The Eternal is infinite . . . always flowing.”

“Like the river,” I said.

“Yes,” he said, “but when the jar opens itself, it becomes unlimited. It can contain the waters of the river . . . So open now your mind, your heart, and your life. For it is only the open vessel and an open heart that can contain the infinity of God.”

The Mission: Today, open your mind, your heart, and your life to that which you don’t yet know, that you might contain that which is greater than yourself.

Isaiah 55:1–9; Jeremiah 33:3; 2 Corinthians 4:7

Filled Up With the Fullness

THE I AM OF ALL I AMS

IT WAS BY the second day that I realized that there would be no set time for the teacher's coming. He came in the afternoon.

"Do you know the Name of God?" asked the teacher.

"I don't know that I do."

"It's made up of four Hebrew letters, the *yud*, the *heh*, the *vav*, and the *heh*: *YHVH*. It's the most sacred of names, so sacred some refuse to say it. And yet you say it all the time."

"The sacred Name of God?" I replied. "How could I when I never knew it?"

"When you speak of yourself, you say the Name."

"I don't understand."

"When you feel happy, you say, '*I am* happy.' And when you're not, you say '*I am* sad.' When you tell others who you are, you say, 'I am' followed by your name. *YHVH* means 'I Am.' It's the Name of the Eternal, the Name of God. His Name is *I Am*."

"Then we all say His Name."

"Yes. And you have always said it. It is woven into the fabric of existence that when you speak of yourself, you must say His Name."

"Why is that?"

"It's because your existence comes from His existence. He is the I Am of all existence...the I Am of all I am's. Your *I am* only exists because of His *I Am*. And as you exist from Him, so it is only from Him that you can find the reason and purpose of your existence. Therefore, when you say your name, you must always speak His Name. And you must always speak His Name first."

"Because..."

"Because His existence is first and your existence flows forth from His. That's the flow of existence. Therefore, you must put Him first and then let everything flow from that. Let everything begin with Him and flow forth from Him. That's the secret of life. To not only live *for* Him, but to live your life *from Him*, to live from His living, to move from His moving, to act from His actions, to feel from His heart, to be from His being, and to become who you are from who He is...I am."

The Mission: Today, learn the secret of living each moment from His life, doing from His doing, loving from His love, and being from His being.

Exodus 3:14–15; Acts 17:28

The I Am Mysteries

THE SHANNAH

HE CAME TO me at night.

“What is a year?” asked the teacher.

“Three hundred sixty-five days,” I answered.

“But in the holy language of Scripture it’s more than that. It’s called the *shannah* . . . and it contains a secret. The word *shannah* is linked to the number two.”

“I don’t get the connection.”

“*Shannah* can mean the second, the duplicate, or the repeat. In the course of nature the year is the repeating of what has already been . . . the winter, the spring, the summer, and the fall, the blossoming of flowers and their withering away, the rebirth of nature and its dying, the same progression, the same replaying of what already was. So a year is a shannah, a repetition. And now you have a new year before you. And what kind of year will it be?”

“What do you mean?”

“The nature of nature is to repeat, just as we live, by nature, as creatures of habit. We gravitate toward doing that which we’ve done before, the same routines and courses, even when those routines and courses are harmful to us. So what will the shannah, this new year, be for you?”

“Well if the year means the repeat, I guess I don’t have much of a choice. It will be mostly the same as the one before.”

“But you do have a choice,” he said. “You see, *shannah* has a double meaning. It not only means the repeat . . . it also means the change.”

“How can the same word mean the opposite?”

“The same way the year ahead of you can be either. The way of the world is to repeat—but the way of God is the way of newness and change. You can’t know God and not be changed by knowing Him. And His will is that the year, the shannah ahead, be not a time of repetition but of change, of new beginnings, new steps, of breaking out of the old. And if you want to experience a year of new things, you must choose to live not in the repetition of the natural, but in the newness of the supernatural. Choose to walk not in your will but in the will of Him who is beyond the natural and beyond all that is old. As it is written, He makes all things new. Open up your life to the newness of His will, and you will walk in the newness of life and in the shannah of change.”

The Mission: Today, step out of your old ways, habits, and steps. Do what you’ve never done before but should have. Walk in the newness of the Spirit.

Isaiah 43:19; Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Shannah

THE RUACH

HE TOOK ME to an open desert plain. It was a windy day, so windy it was almost violent.

“Come,” said the teacher. He was asking me to walk against the wind’s blowing. So I did.

“What is it like to walk against the wind?” he asked.

“It’s a struggle,” I replied.

“In the language of Scripture,” he said, “the word for *wind* is *ruach*. But it has another meaning; it also means the Spirit. In Hebrew, the Holy Spirit is the Holy Wind. So what happens if you walk against the wind?”

“It creates drag. It becomes harder to walk and you get tired.”

“In the same way,” he said, “when you walk against the Spirit, it creates a drag on your life. Everything you do becomes harder. It takes more energy to do less. So when you go against His Spirit, you’re fighting against the Wind. And you can’t walk against the direction of the Wind without getting weary and worn out.”

“And what way is the direction of the Wind, the Spirit?”

“The Spirit is the *Holy* Spirit. Therefore, it blows in the direction of the holy, and blows against the direction of the unholy. Now try something else. Turn around and walk back, the same way you came.”

So I did. I was now walking in the direction of the wind’s blowing.

“And what was that like?” he asked.

“It was much easier,” I said.

“That’s because there was no drag,” he said. “You were walking in the direction of the wind. And the wind helped you walk. It moved you ahead. It made your walking easier. So when you walk against the wind, it creates drag. But if you turn around, then the wind gives you power. So it is with the Spirit. If you turn, if you change your course, if you repent, if you walk in the Spirit, then the drag will disappear. Then the Spirit will empower you and will move you forward. And then everything you do, that you must do, will become easier.”

“So if you walk in the Spirit,” I said, “life will go from being a drag to a breeze.”

“Yes,” said the teacher. “For those who walk in the Spirit, the Wind is at their back.”

The Mission: What part of your life is against the direction of the Spirit? Today, turn it around and start walking with the Wind at your back.

John 3:8; Acts 2:2; Galatians 5:16–17

Ruach

APPOINTING YOUR DAYS

WE'VE SPOKEN OF the year before you," said the teacher. "Today we will speak of the days before you. What will the days yet to come bring to your life?"

"How could I know that?" I replied. "I don't really have a say in the matter."

"But what if you did?"

"How?"

"It is written, 'Teach us to number our days.' What does that mean?"

"That our days are limited, and so it's wise to number them."

"That's correct," he said. "And it's the first meaning of the Scripture. But in the original language is a secret. And this secret can change your life, the days of your life. In the Hebrew it says, 'Teach us to *manah* our days.' The same word, *manah*, appears in the Book of Jonah where it is written that God manahs a fish, a worm, and a wind."

"Then *manah* must mean more than number."

"It does. It means to prepare and to appoint. So you must not only *number* your days, you must learn to *prepare* your days, to *appoint* your days."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that you're not just to watch and wait passively to see what your days will bring. You're to prepare them."

"How can I prepare my days before they happen?"

"How did the first days happen in the beginning? They didn't just happen. Before they existed, God prepared them. He appointed them. He purposed them. So if you're a child of God, you must do likewise."

"How?"

"Prayer."

"Praying for days that don't yet exist?"

"Prayer isn't only for what is, but for what is not yet."

"But I can't determine what will happen."

"It doesn't matter what happens. You appoint your days in God to bring what is good. You consecrate them for the purposes of God. And then you use your days to accomplish those purposes. Don't let your days determine your life. Let your life determine your days. And don't just let your days go by. Prepare them, that they might become vessels of blessing and life. Appoint your days."

The Mission: Prepare the days ahead. Set them apart. Commit them into God's hands and appoint them for the fulfilling of His purposes.

Psalm 90:12; Acts 19:21

The Shannah and the Manah

THE MYSTERY OF THE BRIDE

ON OUR JOURNEY to the city, we stopped on a nearby hill.

“Look,” said the teacher, pointing to an event at the city’s edge.

“It looks like a wedding,” I replied, “or the preparation for a wedding.” The bride, in a white gown, was standing in a garden with her bridesmaids.

“You’re watching a cosmic mystery, the shadow of a mystery. Existence,” he said, “is a love story . . . or was meant to be a love story. The bride is a picture of what we each were created to be.”

“I don’t understand.”

“We were each created to be the bride. That’s why we can never be complete in ourselves. That’s why, deep down, in the center of our being, in the deepest part of our heart, we seek to be filled. For the bride is made to be married. So we can never find our completion until we are joined to Him who is beyond us. And that is why we go through our lives trying to join ourselves . . .”

“Join ourselves to what?”

“To that which we think will fill the longing of our hearts—to people, success, possessions, achievements, money, comfort, acceptance, beauty, romance, family, power, a movement, a goal, and any multitude of things. For the bride was created to be married, and she can never rest until she is.”

“So none of the other things can work?”

“No. None of the other things are the Bridegroom.”

“And who is the Bridegroom?”

“The Bridegroom is God, the One for whom we were created.”

“So we have to find Him.”

“More than that,” he said. “A bride doesn’t just find the Bridegroom; she *marries* Him. So it’s not enough to find God; you must *marry Him*.”

“Marry God? How?”

“By joining every part of your life and being—your deepest parts, your heart, your soul, your wounds, your longings, your desires, everything—to God. Only then can you be complete. Only then can your deepest needs and longings be fulfilled. For the mystery of our hearts is the mystery of the bride. And the bride can only find her completion in the Bridegroom. And the Bridegroom of our souls . . . is God.”

The Mission: Put away anything that substitutes for His presence, and join all that you are, your deepest parts, to your Bridegroom.

Deuteronomy 6:5; Song of Solomon 1:1–4; Ephesians 5:28–32

The Mystery of the Calah

THE POWER OF THE YUD

THE TEACHER LED me out into the desert ravine where we sat down in the sand, face-to-face. He picked up a stick and, with the slightest of movements, created the smallest of marks in the sand.

“This can change your life,” he said.

“An apostrophe?”

“A *yud*.”

“What’s a yud?”

“A yud is a letter, the smallest of Hebrew letters . . . barely more than a dot, so small you could miss it. From the yud came the Roman letters *I* and *J*. And from the yud came the Greek letter *iota*.”

“As in ‘not one iota.’”

“Yes, or as in ‘not one jot.’ It all comes from the same tiny letter.”

“So it’s the smallest of letters. Why is it significant?”

“That’s the point . . . as the smallest of letters, it is most significant. It is the yud that begins the greatest and most sacred of Hebrew words: The sacred Name of God, *YHVH*, begins with a yud. The land of God, *Israel*, begins with a yud. The City of God, *Jerusalem*, begins with a yud. And the name *Jesus*, in Hebrew, begins, as well, with a yud.”

“And what does it all mean?”

“The greatest of words begin with the smallest of letters. In the same way, the greatest works of God begin with the smallest of strokes. Life itself begins on a scale so small, it can’t even be seen. It’s the secret of the yud.”

“And how does one apply it?”

“We are called to the new and to change. But by nature we avoid both newness and change. So how do you change? How do you go from a life of failure to a life of victory? It’s an overwhelming prospect. How do you do it? With the yud. You start by taking the yud of steps, the smallest of steps but toward the greatest of changes. You don’t start out with a great victory, but you take the yud, one small action, one little step toward that great victory. You take that one step, that yud of courage, that iota of change, that smallest stroke of new beginnings, the yud of the life you’re called to live. You begin the greatest of things with the smallest of strokes. You begin by applying the secret of the yud.”

The Mission: Today, take the smallest of actions, but in a new direction, the first step toward the life of victory you’re called to live—the yud of a new journey.

Job 8:7; Acts 3:4–9

The First Step

THE MIDBAR

HE TOOK ME out in the desert to an immense valley surrounded by reddish mountains, which turned increasingly purple and blue as they extended out into the far distance.

“What words come to your mind,” said the teacher, “when you look at the desert wilderness?”

“Dry . . . barren . . . hot . . . austere . . . severe . . . hard . . . forbidding . . .”

“And when people go through hard times—times of loss, crisis, tragedy, loneliness, conflict, hardship, problems, separation, tears—they speak of going through the wilderness. And yet the wilderness is a holy place. It was in a desert wilderness that God gave His Law, His Word, and where He revealed His presence. The wilderness is holy.”

“So the hard times in our lives are holy?”

“For those who are His children, yes.”

“How so?”

“In Hebrew, the wilderness is called the *midbar*. *Midbar* comes from the root word *davar*. And *davar* means to speak. What is the wilderness? It is the midbar. And what is the midbar? It is the place of God’s speaking, the place of His voice. It’s where God especially talks to us. Why did He bring His people into wilderness, into the midbar? So He could speak to them. He brought Moses into the midbar to speak to him through a burning bush. He brought Elijah to the midbar to speak to him in a still, small voice. So too He brings us into the wilderness that He might speak to us.”

“What is it about the wilderness that makes it the place of God’s speaking?”

“Look around you,” he said. “What do you see?”

“Rock, sand, mountains—not much.”

“That’s why,” said the teacher. “God speaks, but we don’t hear. We have too many distractions. But in the wilderness the distractions are gone. So God brings us to the wilderness that we might hear His voice. Therefore, do not fear or despise the wildernesses of your life, and don’t despise His removing of the distractions. Rather embrace it. Draw closer to Him. And listen to what He is saying. Seek to hear His voice, and you will hear Him. For the wilderness in your life is not just a wilderness. It is holy ground . . . the midbar . . . the place of His voice.”

The Mission: Put away the distractions, those things that keep you from hearing. And go into the wilderness, the midbar, and seek the voice of God.

Deuteronomy 8:2–16; Psalm 46:10; Jeremiah 29:12–13; Luke 3:2

The Midbar

THE SHAMAYIM AND THE ARETZ

HE LED ME out in the darkness of the night to a sandy expanse. There we lay down and gazed up into the star-filled skies.

“It’s so vast,” said the teacher, without turning from his upward gaze.

“The sky?” I answered. “I would think it is.”

“In Hebrew, the word for *heaven* is *shamayim*. The word for *earth* is *aretz*. When you hear a Hebrew word that ends with *im*, it’s a sign that word is plural. So what does this tell you?”

“The word for heaven is plural . . . but the word for earth is not.”

“Correct. *Shamayim*, heaven, is plural, but *aretz*, earth, is not. And it’s not just the words; it’s what the words represent.”

“Which is . . .”

“That which is earthly is singular. That which belongs to the physical realm is finite. Everything that is physical is limited. That’s why, no matter how much of the earthly realm you get, no matter how many earthly possessions you possess, it can never fill you or bring you completion.”

“Because they’re limited,” I said, “because they’re finite.”

“And so a life focused on the physical . . .”

“Is a life filled with limitations.”

“But if you empty your heart of physical things . . .”

“Then you empty yourself of limitations.”

“So the things of earth are finite,” he said, “but the things of heaven are infinite. The physical is limited, but the spiritual is unlimited. Only that which is spiritual, the infinite, can fill the heart.”

“But how does one get away from living in the earthly realm?”

“One doesn’t,” said the teacher. “You can’t escape living *in* the earthly realm—but you don’t have to live *of* the earthly realm. You must deal with earthly things, but you don’t have to fill your heart with them. Set your heart on that which is heavenly. Fill up your heart with that which is spiritual. For heaven is *shamayim*, and *shamayim* has no limitation. And, therefore, a heart filled up with that which is spiritual and that which is heavenly . . .”

“Becomes unlimited.”

The Mission: What are your possessions? Today, let go. Free up your heart of its earthly possessions. And fill it up with the spiritual and heavenly.

Isaiah 55:9; Philippians 4:8–9

The Hebrew Mysteries I–IV

THE SERPENT'S BLOOD

DO YOU SEE it?" asked the teacher.

"Behind the rock," I replied.

It was a snake, brown and black, and slithering in the desert sand.

"What do you know about snakes?" he asked.

"I know to avoid them."

"Nothing more?"

"Not much."

"What you should know is that snakes are cold-blooded."

"Why is that important?"

"You're warm-blooded. And because you're warm-blooded, you can run and keep running. But a snake, being cold-blooded, is limited in its ability to endure, to keep going. Therefore, you can outlast it."

"That's good to know," I replied.

"In the Scriptures, the serpent is a symbol of evil."

"Why is that?"

"Not because snakes are evil in themselves but because they provide a representation of evil. They often move by twisting. And so the nature of evil is to twist. A lie is the twisting of the truth. The impure is the twisting of the pure. And evil, itself, is the twisting of the good."

"So then if snakes are cold-blooded, then, so, in some way, is evil?"

"Yes," said the teacher. "Evil is cold-blooded. What that means is this: Though evil may have its day, its victories, its time to move and strike—it remains cold-blooded. Therefore, it can never endure. No matter how powerful the evil may appear, no matter how triumphant and unstoppable it may seem, it cannot last. Deception is cold-blooded. Hatred is cold-blooded. Slander is cold-blooded. Oppression is cold-blooded. All evil is cold-blooded. And so the power of evil is only for the short-term and the momentary. Its days are always numbered. And in the long run, it always fails."

"But the good is not cold-blooded," I said.

"Yes," he said. "So, in the end, the good will always outlast the evil. Therefore, persevere in the good, keep going in what is true, keep standing for what is right, and you will overcome and prevail in the end."

The Mission: In the face of whatever evil, trouble, attack, or sin you're dealing with, don't give in. Don't give up. But press on in the good.

Isaiah 54:17; Matthew 24:13; John 1:5

Snake Busters I–VI

THE FACE IN THE WATERS

WE WALKED FOR some time until we came to a pool of water hidden at the foot of one of the desert mountains. We sat down by its edge.

“Smile,” said the teacher.

So I did.

“No,” he said, “smile into the waters. Lean over the waters and smile.”

So I did.

“Now make a face of anger.”

So I did.

“Now open your hand and stretch it over the waters as if giving a gift.”

So I did.

“Now do the opposite.”

“What’s the opposite?”

“Stretch your hand to the waters, close it, and withdraw it, as if taking something away.”

“I’m not seeing the point of this.”

“Oh, but there is a point,” he said, “and the point is critical for you to learn. When you smiled at the waters, there was a man smiling back at you.”

“My reflection.”

“And when you glared at it, the face of an angry man glared back at you. And when you stretched your hand out to the waters to give to it, the hand in the waters stretched back to give to you. And when you reached toward the waters to take from it, the hand reached back as if to take from you. This is the law of reflection. As you do, so it will be done to you. If you bless others, you will be blessed. If you withhold blessing, your blessings will be withheld. If you live by taking, it will, in the end, be taken from you. If you live a life of giving, it will, in the end, be given to you. Condemn others, and you will be condemned. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Live with a closed hand, and His hand will be closed to you. Live with an open hand, and His hand will be opened to you. What you give will be given back. What you take will be taken back. Therefore, live a life of love, of giving, of blessing, of compassion, of an open hand and heart. Whatever you do, remember what you saw here. Live your life in view of the face in the waters.”

The Mission: What is it that you seek from life and from others? Today, make it your goal to give to others the very thing you seek.

Proverbs 27:19; Luke 6:37–38; Galatians 6:7–10

The Face in the Waters

THE COSMIC LOVE

DEFINE *LOVE*,” SAID the teacher.

“*Love* is to want the best for another,” I replied.

“Yes,” he said. “And to put it another way, *love* is to put yourself in the place of another, to feel their feelings, walk in their shoes, weep with their tears, rejoice in their joys, take upon yourself their burdens, and give to them your life.”

“I like that.”

“The Scriptures declare that God is love,” he said. “If God is love, He must be the greatest love, the ultimate love. Do you believe God loves us?”

“I do.”

“Then what must love do?”

“Love must put itself in the place of another.”

“So what would be the greatest possible manifestation of love?”

“That God . . . would put Himself in the place of another?”

“And how would that actually manifest? What would be the greatest manifestation of love?”

“God would have to put Himself in our place . . . He would have to walk in our shoes.”

“Yes, and feel our feelings.”

“And cry our tears.”

“And take upon Himself our burdens,” he said, “and our judgment . . . and our death, to save us, to give us life. He would give His life.”

“Then if God is love,” I said, “that’s what He *would* do.”

“Then,” said the teacher, “the greatest possible manifestation of love has already manifested . . . on our planet. God putting Himself in our place. And so there is no greater love you could ever know,” he said. “When you feel it and when you don’t, it doesn’t matter—it doesn’t change anything. Nothing you do can alter this love. No good work can increase it. And no sin can lessen it. When you feel it and when you don’t, it’s there nonetheless. We cannot change it—we can only receive it and be changed by it. We can only let it change us. For the greatest possible love has already been manifested. God has come down. It is only for us to receive it and to do likewise.”

The Mission: Today, practice the divine and cosmic love. Put yourself in the place of another—your feet in their shoes, your heart in their heart.

John 15:12–13; Romans 5:6–8; Philippians 2:5–9

THE EAST-WEST CONTINUUM

IT WAS DAWN. We were watching the sun rise over the desert landscape.

“*Kedem*,” said the teacher. “It’s Hebrew for east, a most critical direction.”

“Why?” I asked.

“The Temple of Jerusalem was built according to the *kedem*. It had to face the east. The altar of the sacrifice was at its easternmost end. The holy of holies was at its westernmost end. Everything else was in between. So everything in the Temple existed on an east-west continuum. Everything that took place in the Temple took place on an east-west continuum. Most importantly, on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, the sins of Israel were atoned for, removed from the people, on an east-west continuum. The high priest would offer up the sacrifice in the east, and then sprinkle the blood on the ark of the covenant in the west. He would journey back and forth on an east-west continuum. And the closing act of the day would see the sins of the people symbolically removed from the west to the east.”

“But why is that more significant than if it was a north-south continuum?”

“Because,” said the teacher, “the earth is a sphere . . . and it turns on its axis on an east-west continuum. Therefore, the earth has a north pole and a south pole, but no east or west pole.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“How far is the north from the south?” he asked. “Since there are two poles, the distance is limited. All north comes to an end at the North Pole. And all south ends at the South Pole. If the Temple had been built on a north-south continuum, then sin would have been removed a few thousand miles from the sinner. But how far is the east from the west? East and west have no poles. Therefore, they never end. East and west are infinite. They go on forever. In fact, the Hebrew word for the east, *kedem*, also means everlasting.”

“But back then no one knew the earth was a sphere.”

“God did. And all this is a shadow of the atonement of Messiah, our salvation. So in Messiah, how far does God remove your sins from you? An infinity away . . . an eternity away. And if you had all eternity, you could never find them again. As it is written, ‘So far has He removed our sins away from us . . . as far as the east is from the west.’”

The Mission: Today, take time to ponder and take in the love of God that removed your sins as far as the east is from the west—and live accordingly.

Leviticus 16:14; Psalm 103:10–12

The Mystery of the Kedem

KISSING GOD

THERE WAS A gathering in the school's open-air tent. It was a time of worship and praise. We were just outside the tent listening.

"What do you think of," asked the teacher, "when you hear the word *worship*?"

"Singing, hymns, prayers, words of praise . . ."

"That's the outward form of worship," he said. "That's how worship manifests. But what's the heart of worship?"

"I don't know."

"I'll give you one definition, a secret. It's found in the New Covenant Scriptures. It only appears in the Greek. It's the word *proskuneo*. And do you know what it means?"

I had no answer.

"It means to kiss. True worship," said the teacher, "is to kiss. And what does this reveal? What is a kiss? A kiss is the most intimate of acts. Therefore, worship is to be the most intimate thing you can experience."

"To worship God is to kiss God?"

"In the spiritual realm, yes, to kiss from your heart, from your innermost being. And when you kiss, you don't do it because you have to. You do it freely from your heart because you want to."

"So true worship is never done by compulsion, but freely from the overflow of your heart."

"And why does one kiss?" asked the teacher.

"Because of joy."

"Yes," he said, "a kiss is an expression of joy. And kissing brings you joy. So true worship is an expression of joy. You worship out of joy. Your joy becomes worship and your worship becomes joy."

"Teacher," I said, "we didn't say the most obvious."

"Which is . . .?"

"One kisses because of love," I said. "A kiss is an expression of love."

"It is. So then what is true worship?"

"Worship is an expression of love."

"Yes," said the teacher, "It's as simple as that: It's the most intimate act of love and joy. Worship is as simple as kissing God."

The Mission: Today, draw near to God in worship, in love, in joy, in the deepest of intimacy. Learn the secret of kissing God.

Psalm 42:7-8; Song of Solomon 1:2; John 4:24

Yishkeni: The Divine Kiss

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