

BS”D

APPROBATION

Adon Olam—A Search for Meaning is much more than an exposition of the famous liturgical poem *Adon Olam*. Through its pages the reader will journey on an astounding tour of Jewish wisdom. Whether you are a novice or a Torah scholar, you will encounter here some of the most fascinating concepts about G-d and life that you could ever want to understand. In this work the author weaves all these concepts together with masterful artistry.

I have two suggestions for those contemplating reading this book. Don't be fooled and don't be apprehensive. While this book is written in the form of a novel, don't be fooled by the enjoyable story, and mistakenly put it down, thinking that you want something of more content. And for those who think they might not yet be ready for such depths, don't be apprehensive. This work uses the novel form to enable all its readers to digest these deeper teachings about faith in a pleasant and delightfully adventurous way.

Whoever you are, I feel that this book will help you to grow immensely, in your faith. I wish you all as much growth in reading this work as I have had.

RABBI AVRAHAM SUTTON

2 Cheshvan 5744
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Allow Me to Introduce Myself

I KNOW YOU. I've seen you around and have been waiting for the right moment to speak to you. Believe it or not, I was written nearly 2,500 years ago just for you.

I know there are many Jewish concepts that confuse you. You feel that there is more to Judaism, much more than you presently understand. You are yearning to connect with a bigger picture, but you don't have any idea how to find it. Sometimes you are frustrated, because you don't even know what questions to ask.

I know your feelings and I know your questions. I have known the questions of searching souls like yours throughout all the generations. Your grandparents sang my words. Your ancestors taught me to their children. I was carried throughout history into every Jewish city and home. Through the tortures of Auschwitz I was faithfully recited. In the fires of the Inquisition, Jewish men and women whispered my words. I am still sung today from England to Yemen, from Australia to Kazakhstan. There is no sect of Jews that has not heard of me.

I have all of the answers that you have been looking for.

... Oh, you want to know who I am? You probably think of me as a children's song. I am that prayer you have heard sung in synagogue since your youth. They call me ADON OLAM.

Ah, I see your incredulity. Do not be fooled by my simple appearance. When you come to understand the secrets that I hold, all your confusion will vanish. I was written to be the answer when there was nobody left to give it. I was written to light a path for our people through every kind of darkness that would envelop them.

I know this may sound strange, but some of the greatest men in history imbued my few short stanzas with wisdom beyond space and time. I am alive, Searching Soul. No matter where you have come from and no matter what you have gone through, my words are instilled with a secret message especially for you.

Is this too extraordinary to comprehend? Imagine that you owned a computer that would never need to be updated. The technical advancements built into it would never be outdated, never be surpassed. Its programmers preempted any advancement that could ever be created. Your computer would never become obsolete. It would never arrive at an equation that it could not solve. Such a computer would only dimly mimic the power that our holy sages instilled into my words. I have lasted through the most grueling eras, yet my ability to answer our people's questions will never be exhausted.

Now, after all the millennia, it is finally your turn to receive these answers, now, when you need me the most, and my authors knew that you are worth helping. So take my hand, Searching Soul. Trust me to guide you. There are answers to questions that now seem unanswerable. Your transformation through my words will leave you whole and finally able to call yourself a true servant of God (Hashem)⁴.

We are about to embark on a mission that will close all of the breaches between you and your Creator. Do you dare? Even when a heart has lost the courage to hope, the truth is still out there, waiting. I am now waiting for you.

4 Literally: The Name. It is a reference to the Ineffable Name of God. This has become the traditional way that Jews refer to God, and this term will be used frequently throughout the book.

Braving the Storms

SEARCHING SOUL, my authors knew of the difficulties that would challenge your faith, and my words were composed to help you not only survive the storms, but thrive. Together we will dissect my words until they become your key to the mysteries of the universe.

Like so many, you have many unanswered questions about Jewish faith. You examine even the most basic tenets closely, as you search for clarity in your confusion like a blind man sifting for colored jewels among worthless stones. You often feel lost and frustrated. Sometimes you may even find it difficult to hold onto your practice in the face of the unknown. Or perhaps you are among those who hold on without knowing why, going through the motions of a living Torah⁵ yet feeling dead inside.

Which is worse? Both leave life empty. You, like so many others, yearn to truly understand the truth, yet you are overwhelmed by what appear to be contradictions and dead ends.

My authors had your jewels. They untangled the confusion and polished the diamonds. Now I will start to reveal my secrets to you, but let's you and me take the scenic route, where I will introduce you to a few other searching souls much like yourself.

The issues that bothered them were already addressed in my words. Pay close attention to how these young men you are about to meet, like you, were never satisfied with mediocrity. The more they learned, the more questions they asked, and the more unexpected an-

5 The Torah is the Five Books of Moses. This term also refers to the entirety of Jewish law and other holy Jewish texts.

swers they received. As we will relive their personal adventures, you will receive the answers to both your asked and as yet unasked questions. As your soul will become intertwined with theirs, you, like these young men will unlock the wisdom of the ancient sages and will become a possessor of answers.

It's Been a Year

THE REST OF the *yeshivah*⁶ has just left for the morning classes, leaving just two figures in the empty study hall. Yehudah Stark and Ovadiah Yashar sit together with an antique copy of an Arabic book, whose title is translated as *The Hidden Master*, lying on the small table between them.

Yehudah is a broad-shouldered, light-skinned man in his thirties. His appealing features would easily characterize him to all as handsome. The *yeshivah* hired him two years ago to become the student counselor because of his magnetic personality. He commands confidence without saying a word. He is the kind of man that the young men at the *yeshivah* want to emulate.

Ovadiah, with his fragile looking posture and olive skin, looks at the old, worn leather-bound book. As he looks up from it, his intense black eyes cast a haunting look at his friend and mentor and tears well up in them. Yehudah sees the sadness and uncertainty, but is silent.

“Where did you get my father’s book from, Yehudah? I left it in the safe in the *yeshivah* office.”

“When you came to the *yeshivah* ten months ago,” Yehudah replies quietly, “you told the *Rosh HaYeshivah*⁷ that you were on a mission to learn this book. You and he knew that you were not yet ready. Since this book is written in Arabic and since he knew that I am the only member of the staff who knows how

6 Religious academy for studying Torah.

7 Literally: head of the Torah academy. This figure is usually much more than just a principal. He also helps guide the students in their religious growth.

to read and speak Arabic, I became the logical person to help you, so the Rosh HaYeshivah gave the book to me.”

“Come to think of it, how do you know Arabic? You are Ashkenazic,⁸ with light-brown hair and hazel eyes. I’m missing something.”

Yehudah smiles. “In Columbia University I took up International Affairs with an emphasis on Middle Eastern Politics. So it was natural for me to take Arabic as my language requirement. I liked it so much that I double-majored.”

“So that’s why you went into the intelligence corps in the Israeli Army.” Ovadiah’s tone expresses awe.

“Shhh. We don’t speak about that. Anyway, back to our subject. Three months ago the Rosh HaYeshivah entrusted me with this book, as he felt that the time was nearing for you to start your journey toward fulfilling that mission. Seeing that it is based on ADON OLAM, he sent me to a rabbi who is very familiar with the depths of this subject, so I would learn enough to be able to truly help you. Last night the administration staff met to discuss the matter, and we all feel that the time has come for you and me to finally learn *The Hidden Master*.”

Yehudah’s voice is gentle as he continues: “I know that today marks the first year anniversary of your father’s death.”

The tears that were hanging onto Ovadiah’s thick black eyelashes begin to stream down his cheeks. His voice breaks. “It wasn’t just a death; it was a murder.”

“I know that, Ovadiah. We all do, and I know that nothing can ever completely heal the searing pain that you must be feeling.” Ovadiah nods wordlessly, as Yehudah goes on. “But I hope that maybe you and I will together be able to fulfill your father’s last plea.”

You wonder what plea they are speaking of. Come along with me—we are going a year back in time, traveling to the Yashar household on Long Island—and I’ll show you.

His Last Plea: *Adon Olam*

THE CAR DOOR SLAMS in the driveway. A boy, only eighteen years old, walks into a large, comfortable suburban home on a cool morning. His hands are red with the weight of the grocery bags he is carrying, but the sight he sees changes this everyday errand. Blood is sprayed like water over the hallway. The boy's hands open instinctively, like a baby dropping a toy. Groceries forgotten, he runs along the trail of red.

His footsteps and wild eyes lead him to a man's body strewn carelessly across the floor. The boy kneels down, gasping against an onslaught of tears, choking on his own sobs, as he looks down on his dying father.

The man's last words are whispered to his son, desperately, longingly, "Ovadiah, never forget . . . Adon . . . Olam . . ."

That unforgettable day, a diamond dealer's lust for wealth overcame his respect for human life. Binyamin Yashar, Ovadiah's father, had been discarded on a criminal's way to unearned wealth.

Now, a year later, *The Hidden Master* is sitting between Yehudah and Ovadiah.

Ovadiah reminisces: "It was just a few weeks before Dad's murder that he said to me: 'My son, in the words of the short poem ADON OLAM you can find the answers that can override the tide of pain and loss that Jews have suffered throughout the centuries. We haven't survived the strangest and most violent of national histories in all of humanity unscarred. The balm for those scars can be found here in *The Hidden Master*, the book that your grandfather wrote.'

"You never met my father, may he rest in peace. He died as an old man just before I left Morocco, which was before I even met your mother. He was among the most important rabbis of our people. He wrote *The Hidden Master* for people like me, people who didn't yet understand the depths of their faith. For decades after his death I didn't even open this book's holy pages. A few years ago I picked it up and read it. You may have

seen the difference it has made in my life. Maybe one day we will learn it together. Nothing would make me happier.’

“Now, Yehudah,” Ovadiah says, “I sit here with lots of pain, and lots of scars. This book is closed to me. Not only do I not know any Arabic—so I cannot even read the words—but my grandfather was a wise rabbi and my father told me that there were many deep and even mystical ideas inside his book. I was not raised with any of the tools to understand this book. Until a few months ago I never even dreamed of setting foot in a *yeshivah*.”

Curious, Yehudah asks, “So how did you find this place?”

“Laibel Weiss.”

“Who is he? Tell me about him.”

From Shivah⁹ to Yeshivah

*C*OME WITH ME, *Searching Soul*, as I again take you back a year ago to the incidents of the last morning of Ovadiah’s father’s shivah when Laibel Weiss walked into Ovadiah’s life . . .

An unfamiliar man with a long white beard walks in. Ovadiah is sure he has never met him before. A gruff man, in his seventies, he sits down heavily on the couch. He wears the black suit and fedora of the ultra-orthodox Jews.

“My name is Laibel Weiss,” he says, as he hands Ovadiah a small velvet sack filled with black leather straps and boxes. “I don’t know quite how to say this, but your father was somewhat of a closet Jew. These here are his *tefillin*.¹⁰ He would have wanted you to wear them.” Ovadiah doesn’t yet know what to do with *tefillin*. Laibel’s sorrow is thick, obvious. “I learned Torah with your father

9 The week of mourning following the burial. During this week the immediate family members do not leave their home and guests visit and comfort the mourners.

10 Phylacteries. Leather boxes that contain certain sections from the Torah. They are worn by Jewish men when they pray the daily morning prayers.

“What?! Wait a minute. I don’t know about this. This sounds scary. I don’t want the Satan coming at us in the forest at night.” Shimi’s interest is turning into alarm.

“Oh, don’t worry,” declares Yehudah airily, “I don’t mean here.”

“So where?”

“It’s time to visit the tomb,” says Avi.

By now Shimi is losing it. “Are you crazy? You want to meet the Satan by walking into a graveyard at three in the morning?”

“No, we are not going to walk into a graveyard,” Yehudah replies. “That would be too boring.” Avi laughs while Yehudah finishes his announcement: “We’re going to rappel deep down into a crevice in the earth which holds in its depth a two-thousand-year-old crypt. There we will meet the Satan.”

Avi sneaks away with the rappelling rope. Yehudah throws his gooey stick onto the remaining embers, says his after-blessing on the marshmallows, and starts the group on its small journey.

Meeting the Satan

IT DOESN’T TAKE LONG for the group to arrive at an enormous rock. Natan notices that there is something very unnatural about its shape: it stands twice the height of a large man. In the moonlight its silhouette appears like a giant, jagged egg. He touches it and feels that the rock has obviously been carved into its shape. Yet the chisel grooves are very weathered. He thinks to himself that this rock must have been here for ages. Its base rests in a carved-out indentation in the bedrock. It fits all too perfectly into this depression in the stone, which seems to cradle it. Obviously, the indentation was also created by man. Shalom asks Yehudah when this stone was placed here, and by whom, and for what reason?

As Ovadiah stands, pondering the strange stone, he gets the feeling that something eerie looms beneath. Meanwhile,

Avi is busily fastening the rappelling rope to a large tree near the “Egg Stone.” When Avi finishes tying knots and making footholds, he drops the rope through a narrow elliptical opening at the base of the stone, and calls to the rest of them:

“Leave your backpacks here. I have my backpack. In it is all that we need for down there.”

He grasps hold of the rope and swiftly slithers through the opening and slips out of sight. Moments later the sounds of splashing echo out from the depths of the cavern. Shalom then courageously grabs the rope, followed hesitantly by Natan. Splashing sounds seem to thunder out from the narrow opening. Yehudah grabs the rope, and, before disappearing as well, says, “I certainly hope that you guys know how to rappel and swim in the dark!”

Shimi and Ovadiah now stand alone next to the small opening.

“Hey, Ovadiah, what do you say we just head back to civilization and leave these idiots to their own demise?”

“Bye, Shimi. I am going down. I have an appointment. I have to meet the Satan.”

The sounds of “Watch out below!!!” followed by splashing and laughter are heard echoing inside the cavern as Ovadiah takes the plunge. Shimi shrugs: “Well if you can’t beat them, join them. Or maybe I should say, ‘We will all go down together.’” And with this philosophical thought, he leaves his backpack next to the others and musters up the courage to make the plunge.

Many meters below ground, in the musty cavern, the boys are enjoying themselves, swimming and splashing each other in the pitch black. Their frivolous howling seems to echo in a haunting fashion. Avi swims to the ‘shore’ of the precarious pond.

After a few moments of fumbling around his backpack with his cold and wet fingers, he rips open the watertight seal around the battery-operated camping lantern. Once he lights it, the guys stop splashing around. They all seem in awe of their new

but really ancient surroundings. The enormous cave is clearly carved out of the bedrock by hand.

“O.K. guys,” says Yehudah, “it’s time to go on shore. We have a lot to cover before dawn.”

The now-wet and quite chilly group huddles together on the shore of the subterranean pool. While they shiver and share each others’ heat, Yehudah’s voice is heard echoing through the cavern.

“Take a careful look around you. We are in the antechamber of an ancient tomb. This cavern was chiseled out during the Second Temple period. Its dimensions and structure fit precisely the plans of the crypts described in the Talmud. The deceased was placed here almost two thousand years ago. By now almost nothing remains of the actual body.”

“But why did you bring us to this underground tomb at night?” Shimi wonders.

You Have the Right to Bear Arms

AVI IS THE ONE who answers. “We brought you here so that you would be able to get your swords.”

A unanimous “Huh?” arises from the group, and Avi hastens to explain.

“We are all born knowing that we will eventually die. It is here, in this crypt of death, that we are about to learn why we are alive in the first place. Here we will come to understand why our souls are put into our bodies. Before you can fully understand this, you need to know the Jewish concept of Satan and evil and with what sharp sword of knowledge you need to arm yourself, in order to fight them.”

Yehudah now says,
 “Derech Hashem explains:

Now, the root purpose of the entire matter of religious service and worship is to have man constantly aware of his Creator. He is to

realize that he was created for the sole purpose of being drawn close to the Creator, and hence he was put into this world only to overcome his Evil Inclination and subjugate himself to his Creator through the power of the intellect. He must oppose his physical desire and tendencies, and direct all his activities toward attaining this goal, not deviating from it.¹¹⁰

“That was an echoing mouthful,” observes Shimi.

But Natan has understood it: “Let me put that in simpler terms. Tell me if I got it right. His message is that our spiritual souls were put into physical bodies only in order to fight the Satan. Only through this fight are we able to consciously and meaningfully subjugate ourselves to Hashem.”

“But, obviously, the nature of this fight is not with fists but rather on an intellectual level,” Shalom is quick to point out. “The nature of this intellectual battle is to act against the animalistic nature of the body. We are to use the intellect in order to choose to aspire to a level far above that of the animal.”

“By so doing we strive for closeness to our Creator. It is only through our intentionally fighting this Evil Inclination that we gain merit,” sums up Avi.

Ovadia has something to add: “It is obvious now from what we learned up there at the bonfire that the only way to win this intellectual battle and to subsequently attach to Hashem is to choose to follow the Torah of Moshe, which is His Will. As the *Ethics of the Fathers* tells us,¹¹¹ we need to make His Will into ours. We do this by fighting against any other will or evil that the physical world presents to our souls. The Torah is the only sword in our hands. Without holding onto it tightly, we will lose the battle.”

“I see that my efforts in building the bonfire didn’t all go up in smoke.” Avi is pleased, and so is Yehudah, who says,

“So far, so good. I told you all that ADON OLAM will enable you to enter a new world. This world of ADON OLAM has its own type of war and enemy. The weapons of the world of

¹¹⁰ Derech Hashem 1,4,6.

¹¹¹ Ethics of the Fathers, 2, 4.

ADON OLAM are also different from the world as you knew it before. As Ovadiah surmised, the Torah is your sword, but you are still not ready for battle. You need to know who your enemy is before you can fight him. Let's cross the threshold into the crypt itself and expose the Satan for what he really is. Then we will understand how to stab him with our newfound weapons. Come, follow me."

He then grabs the lantern by the handle and walks ahead into the darkness. The guys follow him through a narrow hallway. As they enter the actual burial chamber Avi shouts:

"BATS!!!"

A swarm of a few hundred bats exit the chamber in a storm of fluttering wings over the boys' heads. They are so numerous that the guys feel the musty air surging through the tunnel. Within a few seconds there isn't a single bat left in the underground tomb. The atmosphere becomes increasingly quiet. In the dull lantern light their eyes start to focus on the damp wall in front of them. They are now standing in front of a very ancient chamber carved into the bedrock.

Yehudah says, "The bats can escape their creepy crevice, but we can never escape our inevitable confrontations with evil. Let's now meet the Satan."

Shimi has been somewhat shaken: "I thought that we just did."

Ovadiah puts it differently: "You guys certainly have a dramatic way about you. I could write a book about adventures with Yehudah and Avi."

A Very Good Enemy

"I BROUGHT YOU HERE," says Yehudah, "in order to conjure up certain emotions. Think about death, darkness, cold, wet and clammy things. Think about fear of the unknown, tumult, chaos, morbid finality, evil, anti-god, the creeps. These are the feelings that are flashing through all of our minds now."

Avi fills in from his store of knowledge: “In many of the other world religions, these are the thoughts that are awakened when their believers think of the Satan or other such anti-gods that they conceive of. But we know that Hashem calls the Satan ‘*Tov Meod*’, very good. In the world of ADON OLAM the enemy is considered very good.”

“Very good?” Shimi is once again astonished. “I don’t get it. What don’t I understand?”

The lantern casts an eerie light that seems to make its way into the narrow, carved-out cavity in the wall. Ovadiah looks into it with a blank face.

Ovadiah echoes Shimi: “Very good??? Where do we see that the Torah describes the Satan as very good? What could be good about evil? We all will die one day. We are supposed to spend our terribly short lives fighting our Evil Inclinations. What is very good about this?”

“In the Torah’s account of Creation,¹¹² the only thing that is called ‘very good’ is the Evil Inclination. The Talmud tells us that the Evil Inclination is synonymous with the Satan who, in turn, is synonymous with the Angel of Death.¹¹³

“Great!” Shimi groans. “Not only are we going to meet the Satan, but we are going to have a convention with his friends, the Evil Inclination and the Angel of Death. What a party this is going to be! If this is what Yehudah calls very good, I’d hate to see what he calls very bad.”

Yehudah places the lantern on the floor. He goes to the end of the burial chamber and comes back with a slightly damp book that Avi had concealed there the day before.

The Prince and the Harlot

“THE SATAN IS CALLED very good,” explains Yehudah, “because the Satan allows for the possibility of free choice. As you look into that burial chamber and think about the

¹¹² Ramban, Genesis 1:31.

¹¹³ *Bava Basra* 16a.

long-ago decayed remains of that short life that it contains, listen to the words of the Zohar.¹¹⁴ It brings a parable of a king who wanted to see if his son would listen to him. So the king told his son, the prince, not to have anything to do with bad women. The prince promised to follow the king's will. After some time the king wanted to see if his son considered his father's will to be important enough to follow even when under duress. He wanted to know if the prince viewed his father as his king and ruler, or if the son's own will would win out over that of the king? So the king hired a very bad woman to try to entice the son. If the son would use all the strength of his will to ignore the evil woman, then the king would allow the son to enter the inner chambers of the palace and bestow upon him many valuable gifts. What would be the cause of these gifts?"

"The evil woman, of course!" replies Natan. "You are obviously relating back to what we just learned next to the bonfire. There you told us how ADON OLAM informs us that we are in this world only in order to call Hashem's Name King. We can accomplish this only by living by His Will, which is Moshe's Torah. You seem to be suggesting that the Zohar's story of the evil woman is informing us that in order to gain closeness to Hashem we need to choose to serve. Without the Satan we would be following Hashem without choice."

"The person whose remains were interred here had his or her chance to choose service," says Yehudah. "We also have our chance to choose to serve Hashem. At the end, both those who choose properly and those who choose improperly turn into the same dust. The life of the body is merely our opportunity to use our swords of Torah to attach to Hashem. If our short lives are used properly, then there is nothing to fear in the grave. Instead of death being the end, it becomes a beginning."

Shalom still needs to see the connection between words and concepts: "Fine, Yehudah. I can understand that Hashem sets up the world so that even evil can be used for good, but how does this make the evil into good? That woman that the

king sent was still an evil lady. The Satan still seems to me to be evil. So why does the Torah call the Satan and evil very good?”

Here, Avi breaks in mischievously: “Now I am going to turn off the camping light. When I turn it on the Satan will be exposed.”

With the light off, they all feel the depth of the darkness. The haunting silence is broken only by the occasional sound of a drop of water landing on the damp floor.

The Jewish Satan Combats Contradictions

AVI SPEAKS in the dark: “All religions have to deal with the existence of evil and the goodness of their so-called god/s. The Greeks were considered amongst the most intelligent of societies in history. When I studied their beliefs on this subject, I thought I was reading a morbid comic strip. Likewise, I was completely unsatisfied by both Western and Eastern religions’ incomplete at best and usually contradictory views of this subject. Then I came across a statement of Rabbi Gifter,¹¹⁵ ז”ל,¹¹⁶ of how differently Torah deals with evil and the Satan. To most of the world’s religions the Satan figure is evil, a fallen angel, almost like an anti-god. Even today’s prominent religious doctrines are reminiscent of many of the pagan religions, like Zoroastrianism, that believe in a good god and its enemy, a bad god. This is the antithesis of monotheism. For since God is the Infinite and encompasses all, then who is out there to go against Him?

“According to the Torah, though, the Satan is neither an anti-god nor a fallen angel. Actually, just the opposite is true. Rav Gifter tells us that when a Jew listens to the Satan and commits a sin, the Satan actually cries. This shows us that its job is not to move us away from Hashem, or, as others claim,

115 A well-known Torah Scholar who recently passed away.

116 Acronym for *Zecher Tzaddik Livrachah*—“The memory of this righteous person is a blessing”.

to pull us towards evil and destruction. Rather, its job is to bring us closer to Hashem by way of our choosing to ignore evil's pull. According to the Torah we can define the Satan as Hashem's loyal servant who gives us the ability to serve Hashem through free choice."

"So we stand here blind in the blackness of this underground tomb," Yehudah says. "Why did I bring you here? Why did Avi turn the light off?"

Natan is incisive in his answer: "Without the light of the Torah we are lost in this world. We live with no hope of eternal purpose. We wander around aimlessly until we die. But if we hold onto the light of the Torah in this lowly physical world, then, like the *Derech Hashem* told us:

It is his very lowliness that elevates him. For when he transforms darkness into light and deathly shadow into sparkling brilliance, he is then able to attain unparalleled excellence and glory."

"So tell me, which world is more important, this one or the World to Come?" Yehudah wants to hear their opinions.

This World is More Important Than the World to Come

"O**BVIOUSLY**, the World to Come," answers Shimi immediately.

"Are you sure?" asks Avi.

Yehudah breaks in through the dark: "This burial chamber contains the remains of a body that held a soul. Souls can either be completely blinded by their body, as we can be completely blinded by the thick darkness of this cave, or they can use the body to hold onto the lamp of Torah and fight their way out of the darkness. But in order to use the lamp of the Torah as our own, we must first choose to grasp it."

Avi bends down to grasp the lantern, lights it, and says:

“One moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is worth more than all of the World to Come.”¹¹⁷ Now look at this burial chamber. How long did this Jew interred here live? No matter who you are, life is short. There are those who claim that the purpose of this life is to get to the World to Come. This short-lived world seems to therefore take on little importance of its own. They mistakenly depict the World to Come as more important than this lowly world. This too is not true. Judaism teaches us that in this world we have an unbelievable power to get close to Hashem. This power does not exist in the World to Come. Here and now is our only chance to set the stage for our eternity.

“While in this lowly world we are actually the ones in control. We can choose when and to what extent we will or will not set that stage for eternity. As Jews we say one hundred blessings every day. Whenever we choose to say ‘Blessed are You Hashem . . .’ we are in immediate connection with the Master of Creation. In the World to Come we do not have the ability to connect more than we already had prepared for over here. There we will no longer have the choice and therefore cannot choose to grow. Yes, our bodies, like the one that was interred here, are short-lived. Yet they are the only way the spiritual soul can enter the physical world of choice. This cold, creepy world is our only chance to choose eternal meaning and life.”

“It is with this thought that we will leave this crypt,” says Yehudah. “Remember that your every step in this world is worth more than eternity. It is only from inside the body that you can be like Avraham our Father and choose to call Hashem the Master of the Hidden World. Be children of Avraham and choose to recognize Hashem in His hiding place.

“It’s time to fight the next battle, Avraham’s battle. Take your swords with you. This time we are going to continue to fight the same enemy that has been hanging around since the time of Avraham. I know where he is hiding. Let’s head out of here.”