How to live?

Every so often I wonder: as a Jew, to what kind of life should I aspire to live? How can I improve my connection with God? And once and again I reach the same conclusion: the secret lies in a verse from the book of Tehillim (Psalm 16): □□□□ □□□□□‘ □ □□□□□. With this verse, King David claimed: “I have set God in front of me, always”, with emphasis on the word “always”.

FEARING GOD

Having God in front of us means having God in mind. It means to visualize (without visualizing God, □”□) that He is seeing me. Think for a moment of an employee that works at an important company. He handles money, solves conflicts and deals with customers. If the employee knows that his boss, the company’s owner, is constantly watching his every movement through the security cameras, this employee will hardly fall into the temptation to behave dishonestly with money that does not belong to him; or fighting with another employee; or disrespecting a customer. With time, the good behavior of this employee, which began as a reaction to being watched by the security cameras, would become his habitual behavior. As the saying goes in Hebrew: what begins as a habit becomes a second nature (□□□ □□□□ □□□□).

Now we can better understand what King David said in Tehillim: if I am convinced that God sees what I do, hears what I say and knows what I think, I will be naturally inclined to do only what is right in the eyes of God. And as long as I don’t stop noticing that I am “being observed by God” I am surely immune from acting in ways I know are not proper.

DOING HIS WILL

Knowing that God observes me not only protects me from being tempted to do what is wrong in His eyes, even when I am alone

and nobody else sees me. When I become aware that God is following me closely, I must assume that God is not indifferent to my life and to what I do with it. And this in itself is a very empowering idea: If He is noticing me, it is because I matter to Him. And since He knows my full potential, He also knows the great things I can achieve. If I reach the level of feeling that God is watching me, and I don't lose sight of this feeling, then I also have the greatest motivation to try and reach for what I can potentially become. And when, beyond *believing* in God's existence, I become *aware* of His constant presence, then I will surely decide to make my will be His will: to spontaneously wishing to do whatever it is that He wishes me to do.

LOVING GOD

Finally, if God watches me, it is because I am a person of interest to Him. His interest in me cannot be a function of God's benefit or any other earthly thing like that… what could I possible give Him or benefitting Him? Thus, His interest in me is totally disinterested. And we, as humans, call this disinterested interest "love." God cares about me because he loves me. As the Tora says, God loves us as a father loves his children. Is any feeling more powerful than knowing that you are loved? And God's love, when one genuinely feels it, engenders a natural reciprocity. Those who, like King David, are able to feel that God loves them, in good times and in bad times, end up loving God back. And this begins a self-propagating cycle of being loved, and loving. Realizing even more tangibly how much one is loved, and then loving even more, etc. Just like a bride and groom, who cannot stop thinking about each other. In that state, when I realize that God watching me translates into His love for me, and for which I love Him back, my mind gets fixated on Him, the object of my love, and all material distractions vanish from the brain. This is how and when we reach King David's spiritual level: □□□□ □□□□□' □ □□□□□

THE WORST ENEMY OF THE TRUE FAITH

What we just described is David HaMelekh's formula for our spiritual growth, or, dare I say, a brief summary of the purpose of the life of a Jewish individual. Living under God's eyes. An knowing it. Fearing disobeying him for fearing to disappoint Him. Naturally wishing to act as He wills. Feeling loved by Him and loving Him to the point of not being able to stop thinking about Him…

There is only one problem. All what I wrote is relatively easy to explain with words. But it is very difficult to do. More precisely, it is incredibly difficult to act in this way with any sort of consistency. It is doable to "live under God's eyes" for a few moments: while praying, while studying Tora (and sometimes even in those moments is difficult to focus). The greater challenge is the "always" Kind David was telling us about. Living aware of His presence "constantly"… How many people, apart from King David, can reach this level of a permanent awareness of God, without succumbing to the enemy number one of *Emuna*: being distracted from God's Presence?

THE EXCEPTION

To be inspired to write this, I had only to think of my dear mother-in-law, ORO BAT ESTER z"l. She embodied King David's motto: □□□□ □□□□□ '□ □□□□□. Without studying Gemara or Jewish philosophy, she articulated this facet of EMUNA, beyond words, with her permanent devotion to HaShem. Aware of God's will that the needy be helped, she volunteered to be that vehicle for God's will and assisted those who were truly needy people, those whom no one knows are poor, because they feel too embarrassed to ask.
She understood God tends to those who need help, and so that is what she did: taking care of the sick, comforting the mourners, helping the widows, protecting the orphans or helping the brides to be.

I will never forget the immense gratitude and joy that she always showed for all that God gave her, which—for that uncommon humility that only those who are very close to HaShem feel—she never felt she deserved.

Knowing that God was watching her, and over her, she always acted with total and explicit acceptance of many and great difficulties she suffered, for which she never complained.

My dear mother-in-law lived permanently in the presence of God. And what is more (and uncommon): her behavior and her actions made others too notice His presence.…

Her life was dedicated to respect and love HaShem and His people; to love and care for her beloved husband Ribbi David Carciente z”l , and for their expansive and beloved family.

Today marks the seventh day following her departure from this earth.

May she be the inspiration for my children and grandchildren and for all those who wonder how to live in God’s presence.