

God Hold Me



Joshua Chasan

PREFACE

Though we sense more about life than what's physical, many of us continue to question the reality of a spiritual source of our being. We abide such cruelty. It's difficult for us to imagine being sustained by an invisible, inexhaustible reservoir of affection. Still, we want such love.

This is a story about summoning the courage to recognize the loving source of who you are. Such love has many names. Over the last twenty-five years I've begun to trust and depend on the God of Israel. Even as I do, I delight in the many ways of addressing the fount of creation. There is no one language of divine liberation. However we call upon love, our love is the same.

My grandfather taught me to be cautious about religious belief. As a young man living in Kurinitz, Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, Samuel Schulman yearned to be free of a world he associated with talk about God. When he discovered that a rabbi had colluded with the czar's police in conscripting him during the Russo-Japanese War, my grandfather rejected traditional religious practice completely. The first thing he did in New York City after leaving Ellis Island was to flout the authority of the rabbis by eating pigs' knuckles.

Schulman (as he was known affectionately by almost everyone) was a gentle man who wasn't afraid of going to hell. He experienced this life

as bad enough. His understanding remains very much a part of mine, though I've no doubt that, were he alive today, my grandfather would fear that I'd fallen prey to an old world illusion.

My father, too, had difficulty with religion. Born in America, he was raised with a wariness of hucksters of any kind. Yet his counsel is as wise as ever. When I began talking about God, he warned me about the dangers of preaching: "At best you're asking me to believe something that I want to believe but can't. At worst you're insisting that I embrace your idea of love, an idea I have no interest in. Show me the love instead."

I hope that I've taken to heart my father's concern, and that people with a range of attitudes about God find their way to these words. They are intended to address an interest in healing, in any way that healing is understood. For those so inclined, the book is designed as a spiritual guide, the traditional teachings and personal meditations intended as exercises for spiritual practice.

Wherever Hebrew appears, it is translated into English that reflects my understanding of the verse. The translations are both my own and adaptations of a number of standard English versions. I've included the Hebrew for its beauty and because learning to read the texts in their original language was very much a part of the process of growth that I describe.

I don't want to convince you of anything. I hope that you trust your own experience as I've come to trust mine. Our time in this life is not for insisting that only our way is true, but for living honestly with the courage of our convictions.