



Study and Discussion Guide

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Chapter 2: The Particular Way

THE STORY

1. This short story begins with a teacher being asked, “Show me the customary way to the service of God!” (9). Think about your assumptions about religious observance and the “customary way” you might think is correct. How do these assumptions help and/or hinder your personal spiritual path?
2. The Seer of Lublin teaches his student that “every person should pay heed to the way to which their heart is drawn” (9). What draws your heart toward God? Where do you feel the most spiritual?

THE INTERPRETATION

1. Buber derives from the Chasidic story that we should not try to emulate the deeds of our ancestors in terms of our own religious observance. In what ways do you try to follow the examples of your elders? How do you forge your own path?
2. It is a natural human impulse to judge our own life and accomplishments against other individuals’ lives and accomplishments, but Buber cautions against this impulse. In what ways do you compare yourself to others? How would your life change if you stopped comparing?
3. One of the strongest messages from this chapter is that “every person has access to God, but for each person the *Way* is different.” Human beings are diverse and unique, and that diversity and uniqueness create “the infinite variety of the *Ways* that lead to God” (11). If this is true, how can we remain connected to our larger Jewish community?
4. Buber teaches that “every natural action, if sanctified, leads to God” (13). Judaism has a long practice of sanctifying everyday actions such as waking in the morning, going to the bathroom, and eating a meal. Usually, this sanctification is done through the recitation of blessings. Can you think of other ways to actively sanctify natural actions? Which action would you most like to sanctify?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Spend a few moments thinking about the times when you felt most connected to God, to others, or to yourself. What were you doing? Make a list of these times and explain in detail where you were physically (at home, in a forest, at synagogue?), what you were doing (reading a great book, hiking, attending Shabbat worship?), and who you were with (your dog, your partner, your community?). Next, imagine what your life would feel like if you could experience that feeling of connection every day. Is there a way to adapt these times from your life and transform them into something you can experience every day? For example, if you felt deeply connected to God when you completed a hike and saw a beautiful vista from a high summit, perhaps you can post a picture of that vista by your work computer as a reminder of that connection. What daily touchstones can you bring into your life to remind you to “pay heed to the way . . . [your] heart is drawn” (9)?