

The Garden of Emuna: A Practical Guide to Life;  
Women's Wisdom: The Garden of Peace for Women;  
The Garden of Peace: A Marital Guide for Men Only  
By Rabbi Shalom Arush

Book Reviews

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Set Apart Ministries, Inc.

July, 2010

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**How these Books Came to My Attention**

During a recent trip to Israel I asked our Jewish Believer guides for a recommendation of a book that might not be easily obtained back in the States. I was given an enthusiastic recommendation for two books about a Garden of Peace. I was further told that one is for women and one for men, and that neither should read the other's book. It was said that these books were incredible and new, that they had changed the lives and marriages of those who recommended them and would surely change the lives of anyone who reads them for the better. One guide suggested that this Rabbi is one of those who is close to recognizing and receiving Messiah Yeshua which certainly piqued my interest. As I looked at them, seeing their full titles, *Women's Wisdom: The Garden of Peace for Women* and *The Garden of Peace: A Marital Guide for Men Only* I realized that they were marriage counseling books of a sort, and saw that the author had also previously written a general one on the same subject, entitled *The Garden of Emuna: A Practical Guide to Life*. Though I had no intention of seeking out marital counseling material, as a clinical social worker who has been in practice for 25 years, providing individual, marital and family counseling, I did wonder what they had found so positive about these books. I purchased the two recommended books and the original in the series in case I needed further background.

Since obtaining my Master's Degree in Social Work with specialties in Marriage and Family Issues and Administration in 1983, I have been familiar with generally every "program" or trend for providing therapy for couples in the secular field, and since 1992 within evangelical or faith based programs. In 2005, I studied several models for couple's coaching, which have a different focus than therapeutic interventions. I have also been a serious student of the Word since 1993, becoming a certified Bethel Bible Series instructor in 1996. I have studied Torah from a Hebraic perspective since 2000. The more I learn, the more I am aware of how much yet there is to learn and find that there are depths in Torah that I am only beginning to see, Praise Yeshua.

Upon my return to the states, I received a written recommendation by a Messianic organization for *The Garden of Peace* and their seminar offering the same material, saying that it was “unique” and “Torah based,” highly recommended for Messianic Believers in America. These are all very strong assertions from personal recommendations. The intensity of recommendations is matched with the foreword and testimonials presented in the book itself.

My background provides the professional background and hopefully, adequate Scriptural knowledge to objectively evaluate these three claims from an American Messianic Believer perspective though I cannot fully address them from an Israeli viewpoint. Since the author grew up in Morocco until the age of 13 his own experience which he describes as foundational to this material is also not limited to Israel. In no way, are these few words the LAST word on this material, but only observations and perceptions. Many specific observations were set aside to maintain a reasonable length to this review.

The three claims are that this material is:

- 1) new and positively life changing for couples.
- 2) unique.
- 3) Torah-based.

The basic concepts of *The Garden of Emuna* and the two companion books written for men and women will be presented with additional intent to review whether or not this material meets these assertions. An author or reviewer’s enthusiasm proclaiming the innovation and uniqueness of a teaching is certainly understandable though it may not actually be either for others. For Messianic Believers, the issue of whether it is Torah-based seems the most important claim to validate or refute. This is already a concern given the cover description of two of the books as being “girded firmly in the foundations of Talmudic and Jewish esoteric thought.”

For those not familiar with the term “esoteric,” Merriam-Webster defines it thus:

- 1) designed for or understood by the specially initiated alone
- 2) limited to a small circle in esoteric pursuits
- 3) of special, rare or unusual interest.<sup>1</sup>

Wikipedia confirms the sense of these two basic meanings. It adds the following information:

the holding of esoteric opinions or beliefs pertaining to the more “inward.”

Scholarly literature identifies the term with “a series of historically related religious currents including Gnosticism, Hermetism, magic, astrology, Kabbalah, alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Vajrayana Buddhism, the Christian Theosophy of Jacob Bohme and his followers, Illuminism, Mesmerism, Swebenborgianism,

<sup>1</sup> [www.Merriam-webster.com/dictionary](http://www.Merriam-webster.com/dictionary), online, July 21, 2010.

Spiritualism, and the theosophical currents associated with Helena Blavatsky.” There is also the note that there are differences of opinion as to whether or not all of these currents of thought involve “inwardness”, mystery or secrecy as a crucial trait. <sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/esotericism> online, July 21, 2010.

**Esoteric knowledge**, in a non-scholarly sense is that which is available only to a narrow circle of enlightened, initiated or specially educated people in contrast with **exoteric knowledge** that is well known, public or perceived as informally canonic in society at large. The term, esoteric, can be used in both a scholarly and a more loose popular sense. <sup>2</sup>

Although there is much wisdom and insight to be gained from these works I do not accord them the same status as Torah nor do I believe that all the concepts included within Talmudic and Jewish esoteric teachings are consistent with Messiah Yeshua’s entire Word.

## Overview

All three soft-cover books are beautifully presented with full color photography on the covers, easily read font style and size, and well formatted. All three also offer a glossary of terms for those unfamiliar with Hebrew terms, having been translated from the original Hebrew by the same person, also a Rabbi of the same school, and student of the author, available in 2005. Names of many women who assisted with the book for women are acknowledged in the translator’s foreword.

Three male Rabbi’s accolades are included in the front of the basic book; *The Garden of Emuna*. Two of these three men made similar comments that were included in the book for men. The same three men made glowing recommendations for the *Women’s Wisdom* book, though I found no written comments from women.

The first in the series, subtitled as “a practical guide to life,” has seven chapters with a very detailed list of subjects in each. The book for men has ten chapters again with a very detailed list of subjects. The first two books are about 300 pages each. The newest of the three, the book for women, has 47 chapters, with fewer subjects per chapter, and is about 400 pages in length. Rabbi Arush writes conversationally and the discussion flows easily from topic to topic. There are many personal observations and vignettes described with compassion and humor intermixed with a frequent use of stern directives “you must” and “you should” observe. Occasional Scripture references are included though there is a far greater presence of quotes from Talmudic books and sages. The foundation of Talmudic thought is well established and evident, interwoven with the practical observations in the two books I have read.

## Review

Proceeding on the basis of the recommendation made, I began reading from “*Women’s Wisdom*.” It quickly became evident that the term *emuna* was definitely central and needed more explanation than was provided.

The opening chapter deals with the search for a mate, offering sensible suggestions such as this: prior knowledge that the entire purpose of marriage is to bring a person into the service of God will avoid many problems. There are five chapters with what I would agree are sound teachings pertaining to raising children. Rabbi Arush uses the terms “child raising” as opposed to “child training.” Briefly summarized, “raising” a child is equated with loving guidance and direction that shapes a child while “training” a child is equated with demands for performance and perfection. These chapters are sandwiched between others dealing with everything from personal and spiritual growth to dealing with a difficult spouse, addictions, speech and weight management, divorce, and an overview of the woman’s arena of power and authority in the home. **The translator enthusiastically states that this is more a guide to life than just a marital guide.** (page 22)

I ran into an objection almost immediately. There is an assumption made that every young woman will come from a home in which her every need was met “as a princess” and that she must overcome this expectation to accept the reality of her responsibilities as an adult wife (page 29). Thus far, having honored the warning not to read the men’s book, I do not know whether the same assumption was made. While there is truth in the need to set aside childish ways, this does not appear to be a valid universal assumption nor does it apply to women only. **Overindulgence, whether of male or female children is an aspect of emotional abuse which does not promote healthy relationships or maturity.** In the past 25 years in America, I have seen a shift in those in need of therapy. Earlier most of my clients came from homes in which there was “just” some kind of crisis they needed to overcome in order to return to former productivity. More recently, most situations seemed to involve backgrounds in which few or none of the family over two or three generations had achieved any kind of stable maturity and thus live in some level of chaos as a “normal” state. Though family dynamics in Israel may be different, the constant state of readiness to deal with terrorism is in itself, a traumatic experience and thus affects maturity in many subtle ways.

Surely there can be no argument that maturity and mature faith in our God will be a positive influence in either country! I read frequent references to this faith, *emuna*, yet there seemed to be some additional unstated factors inferred.

## Emuna Defined

In order to more fully understand *emuna* as it came up in the book for women, I went to the basic life guide on *emuna*. Those who know some Hebrew will recognize the connection of *emuna* with faith and truth. As Frank Houtz of Dry Bones Restoration Company teaches in his Biblical Research Seminar, words have a history or meaning peculiar to individual experience. He uses a simple example of the word “baptism” which to some means immersion and to others, sprinkling. A “word bucket” of faith or truth carries assumptions depending on previous study and understanding. One could read *Women’s Wisdom* simply using a previous understanding of *emuna*/faith and assume that the author means exactly

the same thing which is not necessarily the case. The underlying worldview may be quite different, and in this case, it is different from the worldview of those who have grown up in some form of Christianity. For those of us studying our Hebraic heritage the re-examination of much of what we have believed continues to be imperative, just as I believe it is important for those coming from Judaism to re-examine the tenets of their beliefs.

As I understood the depth of meaning implied by the single word emuna, it became very evident how important this is to the overall message and recommendations to husbands and wives. The need for deep, mature, personal faith is a “given” for all Believers, no matter their gender or background; and much of what Rabbi Arush has described here shows grace and wisdom to help people mature. Yet his use of the term incorporates much more as it shapes the body of his marital teachings. Since this subject is so important in order to give full consideration to these teachings and address the three claims made about it, the subject of Rabbi Arush’s meaning of emuna is examined here.

Rabbi Arush stated that his conclusion is that *“the root of all human suffering is none other than a lack of emuna, the pure and unshakable faith in The Almighty.”* (page 16) He acknowledged the presence of many books that define and laud faith/emuna so his purpose was *“to bring the reader to the unequivocal conclusion that he or she needs to strengthen their emuna, and by doing so, the reader can look forward to a new, happier, and more fulfilling life—in this world and in the next.”* (page 16)

*“Emuna is the original biblical Hebrew term for a firm belief in a single, supreme, omniscient, benevolent, spiritual, supernatural, and all-powerful Creator of the Universe...”* (page 22)

He affirms that Divine Providence determines every event from worldwide down to the smallest of personal experiences and that He uses every experience He sends for the good of His people. Difficulties experienced are opportunities to grow in knowledge and intimacy with God, evidence of His love for us. These trials may be subtle or blatant, depending on the willingness of the person to accept correction. Again, who among those who honor the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could argue?

Before further defining what emuna is, he gives a fine summation of the five primary reasons that people often fail to live in faith. Briefly stated they are:

- 1) doubt that Hashem is constantly within our midst
- 2) doubt that we have the power and privilege to speak to Hashem
- 3) doubt that Hashem listens to us
- 4) doubt that Hashem loves us and desires to help
- 5) doubt that Hashem’s resources are limitless (pp. 34-35)

While we know that doubt or unbelief plays a clear role for many, would it not also be correct to surmise that the root of a lack of faith can also be rebellion against God's ways? Was Eve's choice to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil based on lack of faith? Perhaps, yes. Could it also be said that in her deception, she chose to esteem the sight of her own eyes and her own reasoning, as prompted by the evil one, in rebellion against what Elohim had commanded? Sometimes it is the presence of something "other"

that prompts our poor choices; whether that "other" is our own self-will or the manipulations of the evil one. The human way to deal with doubt is all too often to use it as an excuse due to immaturity or fear, something to be "grown out of" rather than to recognize its profoundly rebellious root and deal with it that way.

The three levels of emuna briefly stated are:

- 1) Basic emuna: belief that all things come from Hashem.
- 2) Intermediate emuna: everything is for the best.
- 3) Upper Level emuna: everything done is for a specific purpose.

Again, there is little room for disagreement among Believers that these perspectives are correct. **The ability to walk them out in the midst of daily circumstances without anxiety, fear or anger attests to how fully one is committed to and genuinely believes they are true. Thus, the premise that emuna leads to peace in the garden of life.**

However, Rabbi Arush also asserts that a single man cannot achieve emuna and is beholden to his wife for his spiritual growth, which includes "soul correction" necessary to merit righteous standing with Hashem.

Rabbi Arush further extends the concept according to Kabbala that **tikkun olam**, meaning "soul correction," is the goal of life in the world: suffering to achieve a higher spiritual level and eventual perfection, "*the greatest achievement on earth.*" (page 27) Aptly describing modern life as "*on the run and under the gun*" (page 30) he envisions instead a place in which people would have their minds on emuna, willing to receive all things, good and bad, as ultimately best for them. In the sense that this refers to maturing in faith through trials there is no argument.

The efficacy of prayer in emuna is noted including the affirmation that Hashem is the Creator of all including nature and that, as such, He can intervene when and however He might choose to do so. Again, there is no disagreement here.

However, later he point blank makes the statement that **nature is not real. It is simply an illusion**, the opportunity to learn to overlook it to the spiritual truths beyond (*Women's Wisdom* pp.200-203). There is a fine line here. God DID create the physical world, and called it good, *tov*, complete. We are told that it would not continue to exist unless He maintained it. Though it helps us picture spiritual truths and it is agreed that we need to look beyond surface level meanings, to deny the **reality** of nature seems perilously close to a form of Gnosticism; declaring all matter to be evil and all spirit, good.

Rabbi Arush is quick to encourage both men and women to develop a personal prayer life which is a part of attaining tikkun olam in this life. He offers some guidelines for development of this prayer life which is equated with emuna. He calls this one's work to build up one's own emuna and suggests it is necessary to do so. He lists methods of doing so which include learning gratitude for small things, praying for every need no matter how small, maintaining a holy lifestyle, and clinging to Torah. He suggests that emuna is increased with learning of Torah but only if the goal is to do Hashem's will, not personal gain (*The Garden of Emuna*; page 255). One way suggested to build emuna is to read and re-read the manual until it is memorized. (page 287) Although these methods seem very human centered, there is also a recurrent emphasis on prayer asking Hashem for greater

emuna. Since I understand faith to be a gift from YHWH that none should boast this underlying emphasis is important to remember. (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3)

The basis for emuna, indeed for Judaism and even for the world according to the author, is drawn from the teachings of Nachmanides, a renowned 13<sup>th</sup> century Talmudist and Kabbalist sage who said:

*“A person doesn’t earn a share in the Torah until he believes that every thing or event in life is a miracle! Nothing is a product of nature or natural course, whether on an individual or a collective scale.” (The Garden of Emuna, page 87)*

It is the concept of “earning” Torah or righteousness that may resonate within Judaism as evidence of their covenant relationship with Hashem though it seems dissonant to those who look to Messiah’s work on their behalf for righteousness. A circumcised heart is the requirement for both Jew and Gentile to be grafted in to the Family of Jacob/Israel. (Deuteronomy 10:16; Romans 2:28-29) From this heart of faith and belief, behavior follows. This may be what Rabbi Arush is referring to yet the language and the inclusion of many sage’s instructions seems to say otherwise. This recurrent theme earning righteousness appears to be an effort to make it into the *olam ha’ba* by another way than through Messiah. Methods of “meriting” righteousness are included throughout this material. Yet Sha’ul proclaims otherwise in his letter to the Philippians, all of chapter 3 addressing those who think their personal behaviors afford them righteousness. The “everything” he has given up regarding as garbage for Messiah’s sake, is clearly not Torah either, in light of his ongoing observance.

In this context, “Afterlife” and “Soul corrections” are not limited to one physical life, but also in additional lives. Reincarnation, that Hashem deems necessary in order for each soul to attain or merit righteousness is included as something for which we are to trust Him. The number of times a person requires reincarnation depends on several things, chief among them the extent to which they lived righteously in a past life. Throughout the *Women’s Wisdom* book there are many examples given of people who are experiencing a trial in life that is explained by what they did in a past life, thus deserving what they are now experiencing. He also puts forth the consideration that parents dealing with misbehaving children must take this as a call to recognize their own misbehavior or their behavior toward their parents in order to correct the problem. This sounds very much like the karma principle of eastern reincarnation theory.

An example is given of a husband dealing with a nagging wife who was told by his Rabbi that he was such a woman in his previous life and so is receiving the correction needed. Another example is that of a male infant dying immediately after his *brit*, which was explained to the parents as a matter of joy since they were allowed to briefly parent one who had been nearly perfect in righteousness but for illness and lack of 8<sup>th</sup> day circumcision. This *tzadek* is said to have needed only the experience of righteous parents fulfilling this obligation for him before he could return to a joyful existence teaching in the afterlife. Such examples continue throughout the text.

If true emuna is desired, Rabbi Arush indicates that it can only be achieved in the Land of Israel so this should be a prayerful desire to visit and eventually move to the Land (page 258).

He illustrates the imperative need for a teacher by quoting from the Gemorra. If it is right to cling to God, yet He is a consuming fire, how can this be done? The answer is found in the need to cling to Torah scholars and tzaddikim who also incorporate the Oral Law in their teaching.

In the basic guide book, the author declares that there are two groups of people from whom we are to pray to be delivered from:

- 1) those without Torah altogether
- 2) those without a spiritual guide (pp. 50-51)

The multi-faceted conclusion is that one cannot achieve emuna without the guidance of the righteous tzaddik of their generation and that what is read is not as beneficial as what is heard from him, Messiah's coming depends on getting close to a tzaddik and in the end, clinging to this tzaddik brings emuna (pp. 258-260).

An exploration of the concept of the evil inclination is provided which is quite extensive. The tension between His omniscience and our free will is all too well known to all believers. Many concepts presented here in his typical conversational style offer some good observations and suggestions for dealing with it. There are also matters pertaining to this evil inclination which I believe come from sources outside of Torah. The perceived difference between the evil inclination of men and women sets the stage for the difference in what is taught about men's and women's roles in this entire series.

### **Impact of These Beliefs on Marital Coaching as Found in *Women's Wisdom***

How does this worldview including tikkun olam, reincarnation and evil inclination play out within this marital series?

Rabbi Arush asserts that women have greater spiritual strength than men do and thus a lesser battle with the evil inclination. He apparently follows traditional Talmudic teaching that women's righteousness delivered Israel when coming out of Egypt, (*Women's Wisdom*, page 310) and that women did not partake of the sin of the golden calf, thus rendering them less troubled by the evil inclination. Therefore, women have fewer obligations in worship practices since they are already on a more lofty spiritual plane. Though I agree it is often true that women yearn for spiritual understanding at a younger age than men, and it flows more easily for them, I see no validation for these conclusions in Torah and would hasten to affirm that Messiah Yeshua, Our Rock, was our Redeemer from Egypt. (1 Cor. 10: 1-9) I suspect the basis for any difference in spirituality is to be found in our Creator's design rather than in the righteousness of women, whether we understand **why** this is so or not. Men have the greater battle with evil inclination and thus there are more stringent rules of Torah observance that they must do to even begin to overcome it and so merit righteousness. As noted earlier, he states that men cannot even hope to achieve tikkun olam unless they are married, and thus, are beholden to their wives.

Since this is the case, Rabbi Arush has declared that women do need to have their own prayer life and Torah study **but** only up to the point that anything they do does not in any way interfere with their husband's need to study. Graciously he allows for situations in which illness or other misfortune would require the husband to care for the home and family. He

declares that the most worthy woman and wife is one who completely removes her husband from any responsibilities for household or childcare, thus freeing him for Torah study. He declares that a woman who does not provide adequate support will be held accountable in the heavenly court for her husband who still needs additional reincarnations to achieve his tikkun olam. Are we to believe that Our Abba wants fathers uninvolved in their children's lives? He does not model that for us! Could there be the opposite position taken in the book written for men, advising them that they are responsible for their wives to this extent? It seems apparent that is not the case, since the basic teaching is that women don't need as much support due to lesser evil inclination issues.

Rabbi Arush, and others as discussed in the books, present a very high ideal of their experience with their mothers, lauding their virtues and the foundation and example that was set for them. Though it is evident that wisdom and kindness were present, at times their praise of mothers seems to border on idolization. Could their strong sense of gratitude and focus on their mother's care for them be so important because their fathers were uninvolved in their lives? This would seem to follow from recommendations made in these materials. When dealing with a man's addictions, Rabbi Arush advises a wife to learn about the problem, bring her husband to understanding of the problem, and then do everything in her power to keep him away from temptation, up to and including going out to earn a living while keeping him home away from the temptation. I do not agree that this process is entirely correct! Understanding of the issues is helpful however, one does not normally have the ability to force another to seek it, nor learn from it. Promoting isolation at home could be an equal or greater danger! Certainly, a wife is to be helpful and supportive while a husband deals with such issues, but it is not emotionally healthy or mature for anyone to assume so much responsibility or control over another adult.

Financial hardships are said to be the result of the lack of adequate charity thus by giving financial gifts, any losses or taxes will be offset by the amount given. While it is noted that this needs to be done with a right heart, the example given is one in which charity is wheedled from someone without their knowledge in order to save them from their anticipated financial losses. The conclusion is that if the person had known this power of giving, they would have done so and they would now give in order to prevent future financial loss.

Illness is seen as a direct result of sin, and it is stated as the Gemorra teaches that only the person to whom Hashem has given the authority could possibly heal the person and only at the designated time to do so. *(Did not Yeshua correct those who thought sin is the only cause of illness, in the context of healing blindness of one whose infirmity was allowed in order to provide opportunity to demonstrate His identity? John 9: 1-38)*

It is further taught that these limits can be affected by *Pidyon Nefesh* which means the redemption of the soul. It is said to be possible alter Hashem's determination by counting the gematria value of one's name, and then giving this sum of money to a righteous tzadik who will use it for charity. (pp. 126-127)

These last three recommendations appear to be nothing short of magik or witchcraft, and do not address the matter of circumcision of the heart but rather some form of manipulative behavior aimed toward changing God.

Basic teaching is that one should strive for belief and behavior that will merit being righteous. Since they don't know Messiah they have "figured out" all kinds of ways to persuade or manipulate God to grant them righteousness. The goal of actually doing Torah and not just speaking it is clear but the types of behaviors recommended too often seem to reflect confidence that man's actions will manipulate God rather than just pleasing Him.

*Brothers, my heart's deepest desire and my prayer to God for Israel is for their salvation; for I can testify to their zeal for God. But it is not based on correct understanding; for, since they are unaware of God's way of making people righteous and instead seek to set up their own, they have not submitted themselves to God's way of making people righteous. For the goal at which the Torah aims is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts. For Moshe writes about the righteousness grounded in the Torah that the person who does these things will attain life through them.*

Romans 10: 1-5 CJB

Who could argue with the understanding that the spiritual root of all vices is arrogance, fantasy fueled inflated ego (page 388)... yet can we agree that with absolute faith one's evil inclination disappears? (page 389) I see more that we are given the authority through the Spirit to overcome these things within our natures, not that they will be gone in this life. (Romans 8: 1-12)

There is much more to point out but my time and my heart fail in the process. Perhaps, more specific observations of what is taught and the implications may be provided at a later time, and with the assistance of several men who may read the men's manual. Until then, I continue to seek Abba's Face and Hand for His truth in all things, through Messiah Yeshua's presence and work on my behalf...on behalf of all His children.

## **Conclusions**

The basic premise of these books is that personal faith/emuna in HaShem, when developed fully, will allow one to live a life free of negative emotions regardless of circumstances which in turn will merit their being declared righteous with no further need for soul corrections and additional reincarnations. This will in turn, improve their relationships on earth and with Him. The books for men and women then further develop the ideas of what this would "look like" for each. The woman's book includes this picture as it applies to raising children as well. This approach is a valid recognition that maturity in faith and discipleship toward personal growth of believers is beneficial though I do not see it as new.

The ideas presented are intertwined with the Talmud in a way I have not seen before and which others say hasn't been done before so in that sense it may be new and unique. If these recommendations are followed they could well bring positive change if both spouses agree that these goals are correct.

And the current question of whether this material is Torah-based and desirable for Messianic Believers in America? I do not believe this is the case and I cannot encourage this series for those who know and follow Messiah Yeshua.

As stated by the author and the translator, this material is seen as much more than just a marital guide. **It is seen as a manual for life.** I agree with their statements. **As such, it is a primer for the Talmudic Kabbalistic view of Scripture and of life:** a portal into a belief system and subsequent behaviors.

I have found it very difficult to review this material objectively. To address each specific objection eventually led to addressing the underlying assumptions which in effect, amounts to refuting the entire body of Talmudic and Jewish esoteric thought. Despite the content that initially sounds positive, upon exploration of the intended meaning of the terms I discovered the depth of the influence of Talmud that permeates it. Much additional material which I would consider the realm of folklore, superstition and at worst, out right forms of witchcraft, is included as methods by which to “obtain righteousness.” I do agree that there is depth of meaning to the Scriptures that grows as one studies and thus is not available to everyone BUT I do not think that this experience is restricted to some small circle of initiates. Messiah Yeshua’s words as recorded in Matthew 15: 1-14 are a direct rebuke to the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law as He told them they kept their traditions over the Torah, quoted Isaiah’s prophecy about their hypocrisy, defined unclean, and affirmed that Elohim will pull up what is not His, calling them blind guides to be avoided.

*Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.* v. 10

In Matthew 8 it is recorded how amazed the people were that He taught with such authority, not as their scribes. Is it wrong to equate Talmudic teaching with these things? How would it be helpful to those who know Messiah and have accepted His work on their behalf to go under the influence of leaders and traditions of men that He spoke so vehemently against? If THE righteous Tzadek of the generation is indeed THE Messiah Yeshua, then all that is said I would consider true! However, Rabbi Arush appeals to the sages and accepts that a mere human being can attain infallible righteousness, which I would understand to be a breeding ground for a significant fall.

In fact at one point, he refers to the concept of emuna as being like a traveler who trusts the driver of the bus to do what is right and necessary to reach the destination while another traveler worries and arrives in great distress (*The Garden of Emuna*; pp. 80-81). I have personally heard this illustration used to justify unprofessional and disrespectful behavior simply because the leader was the one “driving the bus” and whatever action taken was to be received as for the good, whether it was polite, truthful, dependable or not. If the driver of the bus is Yeshua, yes! If anyone else, the potential for abuse exists. One could say that clearly, such a one is not a tzadek, but who is to make that determination? If one is never allowed to question nor can one’s own discernment of Torah teaching be trusted, what remains?

Since Messiah’s atonement is considered future, it would appear that a number of these recommended practices are part of man’s effort to be considered righteous and to merit inclusion in the covenant, and thus however well intentioned, a reflection of self sufficiency, rooted in fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Jewish Believers have said that they simply overlook the parts they disagree with and glean the good from this material. It is often true that we must patiently agree to disagree with

others in matters of faith, however in this case, this “difference” reflects the entire worldview. This may be **feasible** for those who are well able to discern the difference between Torah and Talmud but not necessarily **desirable**. The author subscribes to the belief that to deny Oral Torah and Rabbinic sages is evidence of the evil inclination so how could this be compatible if they are simply trying to glean out the morsels without swallowing the whole? (page 264-265)

I do not see this as feasible for the average American Messianic Believer. I question whether it is reasonable to expect anyone to be able to know where to make the “cut” between what is Talmudic and what is Torah. Once one accepts the precepts described and begins to internalize them and reason from those assumptions, even if they are faulty precepts, the later more full description of what they have ascribed to may now “seem” acceptable. More than one person has lamented how the desire for Truth of the Word and understanding Hebraic heritage has ended up in an infatuation with anything perceived as “Jewish.”

Here is an example of a flawed assumption that leads to behavior. The Garden of Peace series also includes the understanding that each person cannot understand Torah on their own but must have both the Torah **and** THE righteous Tzadek of their generation to guide them. They are to follow him without question. If you can’t achieve emuna without having a righteous tzadek guide you, how would one even KNOW who is a righteous tzadek? Any person or group that declares a person or book equal or greater to that of Scripture is generally considered a cult. Where does this leave this teaching?

Though he does not himself claim to be that righteous Tzadek of this generation, others say it of Rabbi Arush. Justification of the need for a Tzadek came from the Gemorra in which the author made reference to what is seen as the impossible double bind of trying to draw near the consuming fire that is our God. The declared solution is to cling to the tzadek of the generation and their words which are more important than what is read. (*The Garden of Emuna*, pp. 258-260)

Could this be related to Exodus 5? Here it is recalled that Hashem desired that all of His people hear His commands directly from Him. Their fear caused them to stand back, and declare their fear that the consuming fire of YHWH would destroy them as they questioned who could stand.

The Gemorra principle here is a false assumption and thus, any following argument is invalid.

Clearly Moshe had been able to draw near to the consuming fire on more than one occasion as did Joshua. Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego might be surprised to hear that one could not draw near to the consuming fire without being destroyed.

Moshe was to draw near and receive the commandments, statutes and judgments which he would then relay to the people. Though YHWH affirms that the people are right in what they have said, yet He laments that they do not all have the heart to desire to draw near to Him as Moshe does. He establishes the precedent to give His commands to Moshe who will give them to the people.

I do not believe that this is the final intent. To have a righteous person who is close to God help in mentoring people is unquestionably wise, but to conclude that this is the outcome and standard for all people for all time seems overreaching. The goal is for each person to have their close relationship with YHWH and desire to draw near to Him. Though He is a consuming fire, for those who have circumcised hearts there will be a willingness to undergo that fire of cleansing, knowing that it is only that which is NOT godly at risk.

The portion of this material that deals well with maturity and relationships is available in other formats without the inclusion of the esoteric worldview and I would be happy to direct people elsewhere for this.

Evidence of Rabbi Arush's kindness and humility is seen along with these foundational beliefs throughout the material. This review is in no way intended to belittle or denigrate him. I have much to learn yet I believe there is a need to issue a warning here to those who come into these teachings with no idea at all of the foundational worldview they teach. If he is indeed listening to the Spirit of the Living God then he, too, will be brought to recognition of Messiah Yeshua as Sha'ul was and perhaps, as one of those who recommend his books said, he will soon acknowledge Him and begin the examination of this set of beliefs as well.

Prophets such as Moshe and these other leaders of faith are to be respected as they teach us Torah, but only Yeshua Messiah is infallible and fully able to reach our hearts, teaching us grace and truth by His Spirit as well as His written Word. I suggest we would do well to read the entire Scriptures over and over to internalize them rather than committing as much time to these materials.