

# 2008 **THOUGHT TOOLS**

Fifty Timeless Truths to  
Uplift and Inspire

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Rabbi Daniel & Susan Lapin

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## INTRODUCTION

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Some years ago, my wife Susan and I sailed our forty-four foot sailboat, Paragon, from Los Angeles to Hawaii. From the time the California coastline dropped away behind us until we reached Diamond Head, Honolulu, twenty-two days later, we were surrounded by more water than we had ever imagined. We had seen the charts, of course, and knew that the earth was mostly water, but sailing along seeing absolutely nothing but sky and ocean was an entirely different reality.

In ancient Jewish wisdom, water is seen as a metaphor for knowledge. The source of all wisdom is God's word, the Bible, or as we call it, the Torah. Susan and I were both privileged to receive a Torah education growing up, and since we found each other an important piece of our partnership in life has been immersing ourselves in the waters of Torah and sharing what we could with others. It is deeper, broader and more enchanting than even the Pacific Ocean.

On that Pacific voyage, in addition to our four friends who came along as crew and our small daughters, we discovered

that there was a stowaway as well. Nine months after our voyage, when we were safely back home, we welcomed our son, Ari, to our family.

Last year, after he had graduated college with honors in physics and a large amount of Torah knowledge, we dared to hope that he would suspend his business studies and help us develop our publishing company. He generously responded to our appeal and the weekly Thought Tools, now read regularly by tens of thousands of people, was one idea he formulated brilliantly and turned into a reality.

We were gratified by the enthusiasm for these short spiritual insights and followed our son's advice to publish the first fifty Thought Tools as the book you now hold in your hands. Our goal is to provide you with a sourcebook for meaningful discussion and conversation for it is there, in mankind's unique mode of communication, that individuals distinguish themselves.

People all tend to experience physical stimuli in basically the same way. Those of us who enjoy a barbecued steak all tend to react to it in a similar manner and we all share enjoyment of a drink of cool water on a hot day.

However, we react to emotions in ways a little more reflective of our own uniqueness. How one person reacts to a happy event or a sad scene might be entirely different from how his friend reacted to the very same occurrence.

Still more individual are the thoughts we each bring to life in our souls and minds. It is those thoughts that we hope to stimulate through this book and thus help bring out your own special uniqueness.

We truly are what we think and what we talk about helps determine our thoughts. Just as exercise can be done correctly or incorrectly, so the time we invest in speaking and thinking can be used more or less effectively.

It is very easy to speak about people. More than that, it is also very enjoyable to speak about other people. There would hardly be so many magazines devoted to celebrity gossip were this not so. Yet there is something unappealing and unfulfilling about trying to seek content in our lives by scurrying around in the detritus of other folks' lives.

It is a little harder to speak about things though it is certainly more beneficial than speaking about other people. Some individuals can speak incessantly of places they have visited or food they have enjoyed, others of items they have or hope to buy. This is definitely a step up, but it still leaves our souls thirsting.

Of all conversation, none does so much good and produces such creative thought as conversation about ideas. We hope these Thought Tools spur you to a greater appreciation of God's word and His world and that in sharing them with your family and friends they serve to help you grow individually and together.

We would be remiss if we didn't recognize our daughter Ruthie, who missed that boat trip by a few years, but who, with her husband Asher, helped us out this past summer while Ari and his sister, Miriam, another latecomer, mentored teenagers in Australia, sharing Torah knowledge with them. And of course, our valiant original crew, who continue to light up our lives, Rebecca, Rena and Rachelle

and their land-lubber husbands Max, Yoni and Zev, noble-  
men all. Our baby, Tamara, who is about to graduate high  
school has trouble explaining to her principal that she'd  
really rather be boating. We love you all.

This book would not have been possible without our friend  
and partner, David Crocker. David and his wife Jenny en-  
tered our lives a few years ago and we are incredibly fortu-  
nate that they have joined us in our publishing enterprise.

Do make sure you sign up for a new weekly Thought Tool  
at [www.rabbidaniellapin.com](http://www.rabbidaniellapin.com). We look forward to learning  
and growing together.

Rabbi Daniel and Susan Lapin  
December 2008

Kislev 5769

## ANCIENT SOLUTIONS FOR MODERN PROBLEMS

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**That material was taught to the Israelites during forty years in the desert; history's longest graduate school program.**

Let's imagine that you made some incredible discoveries of inestimable value. Recognizing that children are your link to immortality, you desperately wish to be sure that your grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and further, will be able to use the information you have uncovered.

You sit down to write it up. Then, in dismay, you realize that there is no assurance that your descendants will understand English. Maybe your grandchildren will immigrate to another country and their progeny will read another language. It is also possible that in the same way that we barely understand English from 500 years ago, maybe our current form of English will be utterly incomprehensible to future Americans. What can you do?

Aha! Another idea strikes you. You sit down in front of a video camera and you describe your discovery and all the vital data. But wait a moment! Had your grandfather passed down to you valuable information recorded on early twen-

tieth century wax cylinders, how would you go about listening to it today? Technology marches on and it is possible that your descendants would have no way to view or listen to your meticulously recorded treasures. What is more, this doesn't solve the language problem should English no longer be used by your offspring.

Then you are struck by a dismaying thought: even if your descendants could read your book or understand your video, how can you be sure that they would be motivated to do so? After all, did you ever read your grandmother's diaries?

You do see the challenge, don't you? What are you going to do? Happily, I have an idea for you.

First, forget about doing this project in English which like all languages keeps changing. Well, actually, there is one exception – Hebrew. A Jewish school boy today can read and understand the words of Jeremiah the prophet. Hebrew, the Lord's language is unique. It never changes.

The next question is to ensure that your descendants will care. Will they be motivated to explore your ideas? One answer would be to cunningly contrive to write your material with many layers of meaning. In this manner, your grandchildren who read it while young, will grasp the top-most level – the superficial narrative.

Perhaps your book might have a sentence like this one: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Children who read it are introduced to an idea which is captured in a word picture. They can get it. It is really clear – in the beginning God created everything.

As they grow older and mature, they are able to grasp the next level of meaning and those familiar words from their childhood now take on new relevance. In the beginning God created all things tangible and physical, but He also created all things spiritual, heavenly, and intangible. Okay, that's kind of interesting. So at the root of it all, God is even responsible for things like love and loyalty, not only mountains and oceans.

Time goes by; they reach middle age and become wise. Astonishingly, they discover yet new levels of meaning. Not only did God create spiritual things that are heavenly and intangible but these things impact your life every day. There are spiritual forces and powers in the world. Keep on reading and studying this book and you will gain the ability to integrate them into your plans.

But wait! There's more. Not only are you going to build in multi-layered meaning (I didn't say this would be easy) but you are going to include so much encoded information that reading this book will become an exciting voyage of discovery. Every sentence offers limitless possibilities of new discovery as your descendants enthusiastically unearth your secrets.

Letters are going to have numerical equivalents which will point the reader at important connections. Words used in unexpected ways will forge new meanings. Grammatical anomalies, apparent errors, and even the shapes of the letters themselves will lead to treasure. Even reading some words backwards will throw beams of laser-like clarity onto reality.

Sounds like quite a challenge, doesn't it? In fact, I doubt that this lies within human ability. It might be a task only for God. And who else has such valuable secrets of life as to make this entire arduous exercise so worthwhile?

The final piece of the puzzle is that God didn't want to leave to chance the likelihood of mankind discovering on its own all the many layers of meaning and all the hidden clues of relevance.

He dictated the Bible to Moses during the daylight hours on Mount Sinai and during the nights he drilled the great teacher of Israel on the hidden meanings and multi-layers found in every letter and word. All that material was taught to the Israelites during the forty years in the desert, history's longest graduate school program. From them it was handed down, father to son and teacher to disciple, and known until today as the Oral Torah or as I sometimes call it, ancient Jewish wisdom.

Well, a hundred generations or more have come and gone since this book was presented to humanity, and we still pore lovingly over its pages extracting incredible discoveries from its infinite depths, just as our grandchildren and theirs will also do.

Now it's your turn. Dig deep and with passion for the immortal treasures that will enhance your life.

## GOOD INTENTIONS

---

**Abraham didn't press the snooze bar three times.**

Good intentions. Don't we all have lots of them? We're going to lose weight, make a serious budget, tackle the garage, stop yelling at the kids, send out 50 resumes, etc., etc., etc. Yet, when tomorrow, next week, or next month arrives, we're often unable to check much off our list. We continually assure ourselves that we intend to do it, but what we actually do is continue procrastinating.

This gap between our intentions and our accomplishments makes us very miserable. Sometimes our self-loathing reaches such depths that we seek escape by trying to make ourselves feel artificially good. I use the word 'artificially' because instead of exulting in the inner joy of achievement, procrastinators usually try to feel good by indulging in alcohol, shopping, sex, or unhealthy foods. Obviously, all that only makes things worse.

What causes this downward spiral? Why do we procrastinate? The answer is simply; gravity! Yes, that is right, gravity. Or, to be more precise – Spiritual Gravity.

Let me explain--

Gravity tries to keep airplanes on the ground. We could talk about how and why this works, but for now, let's just accept the reality. Similarly, spiritual gravity also tries to keep us down. It tries to prevent us from becoming better, healthier, more accomplished, more spiritual, more learned people. We could discuss how and why spiritual gravity works against us but for now, let's just accept reality.

By contrast, when we extract the chemical energy in jet fuel, employ an engine to convert it into thrust, and use wings to convert the thrust into lift, an airplane can remain airborne about five miles above the earth's surface.

In a strikingly similar way when we extract some of the spiritual energy stored in our souls, employ it in the powerhouse of our being and combine it with some ancient Jewish wisdom, we can fly. We can achieve our goals and overcome the poison of procrastination.

No matter how horrible the tasks you've been avoiding, nothing could possibly be worse than that confronted by Abraham when God tested him by instructing him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. I'm sure you'd agree that nobody has ever had a better reason to procrastinate. Let's see what our founding father, Abraham, did.

*And Abraham awoke early in the morning,  
took his two young men and Isaac his son, and went  
to the place of which God had told him.*

(Genesis 22:3)