



**SAL LITVAK**

**HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR, FOUNDER OF THE ACCIDENTAL TALMUDIST**

Salvador Litvak was born in Santiago, Chile, and moved to New York at age five. He attended Harvard, NYU Law, and UCLA Film school. He directed the Passover comedy and cult hit, *When Do We Eat?* starring Max Greenfield, Ben Feldman, Shiri Appleby, Lesley Ann Warren, and Jack Klugman in his final role. Sal also directed *Saving Lincoln*, based on the true story of Abraham Lincoln and his closest friend and bodyguard, Ward Hill Lamon. It features a new visual style called CineCollage, which places the actors within actual Civil War photographs. Houghton Mifflin has incorporated the film's Gettysburg Address scene into its American history textbook. Sal wrote both films with his wife, Nina. Their next picture is *Man in the Long Black Coat*, starring Mark Feuerstein, Christopher Lloyd, Dermot Mulroney, and Neal McDonough. The film is a neo-western mystery thriller about a Chassidic rabbi who investigates a seeming hate crime and uncovers a far more sinister truth.

A pair of miracles propelled Sal on his faith journey, leading him to create the Accidental Talmudist, a nonprofit social media platform. He and Nina share daily posts on Jewish wisdom, history, and humor with over one million followers in 70 countries.

# The Language of Events

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I was a teenage science-fiction fanatic. My heroes were Heinlein, Asimov, and Clarke. They rarely talked about God. At the time, Hebrew School was a three-day-a-week chore that I mostly dreaded, and my teachers there didn't talk much about God either. Nor did my parents, friends, or public-school teachers. And yet, I somehow formed a relationship with the Almighty.

He (an admittedly clumsy pronoun for a Being beyond gender) is the strong, silent type. He hasn't spoken to me in words, but He speaks to all of us constantly in the language of events. I started paying attention at a young age because it seemed absurd to me that the universe and all its trillions of stars could have burst into existence out of nothing. The Big Bang had to have been *willed*. It had to have a Creator.

And if that Creator placed thinking creatures in the creation, it stood to reason that He would be interested in having a relationship with them – with us. So I started talking to Him. Decades later I learned that I had stumbled onto an important Jewish practice. You can do it too. Simply talk to God as you would to a close friend. Not in your thoughts, but with your lips. It's liberating and rewarding. I suggest trying it in private. People can be pretty judgmental about such things – their loss.

When you talk to God, a few things happen. Since there's no point in lying – He knows what's what – you hear a dead honest version of yourself. More honest than the voice inside your head, which often self-deceives. And since God answers in His own way and in His own good time, you grow in patience. Eventually you even begin to grow in wisdom.

In Psalm 90, Moses addresses this process. He was luckier than most. God spoke to him in words. Moses understood that he was privileged, so he left us some guideposts for fashioning our own relationships with God. The Torah is the big one, but Psalm 90 is pretty special too. In it, Moses scripted an average person's one-sided conversation with God, including the line, "Teach us to number our days, that we may acquire a heart of wisdom."

When you speak with the eternal One, you soon realize how short life is, even if you're blessed to reach 120 like Moses. I don't know about you, but my tendency is to waste a lot of time, time I'll regret having wasted when I'm lying on my deathbed. Now, no one likes talking about their deathbed. Talking to our Creator, however, accomplishes the same task without being so grim. In fact, it's joyful. Highly recommended.