

## The Flakefoot Falcon

The previous three chapters taught us how to make peace with God and with our fellow man. This chapter presents us with a bigger challenge—making peace with ourselves.

### The Flakefoot Falcon

Mount Patience, known also as Old Isaac's Mountain, is a haven for flora and fauna. Ornithologists and amateur bird-watchers love coming to this part of the mountain, the high cliffs overlooking Peace River Canyon. Here is the home of a unique and almost extinct bird of prey, the flakefoot falcon.

Flakefoot falcons get their name from a peculiar hereditary characteristic—they are born with a form of innate chronic psoriasis. The scales on their legs and feet flake their entire lives.

Falcons are the epitome of aviary splendor. They have proud faces, wings of aerodynamic perfection, and telescopic eyes with macro attachments that can hone in on a field mouse from a mile away. Their exquisite gold feathers literally sparkle in the sunlight. Yet, flakefoot feels very self-conscious and insecure whenever it looks at its own scaly feet; some falcons even lose their will to live . . . .

As opposed to other species, the male flakefoot is a skilled hunter and sole provider, while the female devotes most of her time to the nest and to raising her youngsters. Flakefoot couples are fiercely loyal to one another, and religiously monogamous. If a flakefoot dies, the remaining mate won't live more than a week or two.

If you haven't seen a flakefoot falcon in flight, you can't imagine the meaning of poise, grace, and natural majesty.

On the ground, a flakefoot feels miserable. The falcon's emotions in flight though, switch from depression to exhilaration. Its inferior self-conscious image on the tarmac gives way to the

royal bearing of an undisputed king up in the sky. In the clear blue, it forgets about its ugly, flaking feet; they're tucked away like landing gear.

The higher the bird flies, the stronger it feels.

Like all birds and animals, the flakefoot falcon is especially close to his Creator. At the apex of its flight, it chants a cry of victory, which is really a song of praise to God. Old Isaac says that the falcon repeatedly quotes a passage from the Book of Psalms (19:2), "The sky tells of God's glory, and the horizon praises His handiwork."

Like a magnificent monarch surveying his domain, the bird banks along the wind current and completes an effortless three-mile circle of the canyon with ease, barely flapping his wings. The exuberance of high-altitude flight, the wind in its feathers, the royal-blue sky, and the bird's eye view of his kingdom give it a fresh new will to live.

Suddenly, the male flakefoot remembers the needs of his family. Thousands of feet above the canyon floor, he hovers like a satellite, scanning the ground below. There, he's spotted something! What a scary nosedive!

The falcon approaches ground level with remarkable speed, and at the very last instant, levels off in flight while nabbing a helpless little rodent in his beak. He now soars upward, and within seconds, arrives home to the niche in the cliff with lunch for the family.

Spellbinding, isn't it? What a wonderful gift from heaven—the privilege of observing a flakefoot falcon.

By putting our powers of spiritual awareness to work, let's examine the many lessons we can learn from a flakefoot falcon.

## **Being at Peace with Yourself: The Ten Lessons of the Flakefoot Falcon**

*Lesson number one: Look for your good points; try to find your particularly special attributes, skills, or talents, and cultivate them to the best of your ability.*

The Almighty creates each and every being with a unique trait of its own. You are no exception. The particular attribute, skill, or talent that God instills in you enables you to accomplish your own very special mission on earth. If you're unhappy with your lot in life, chances are that you haven't yet tapped your own rich resources, and therefore are not yet fulfilling your own distinc-

tive mission. If you have the talent to develop a cure for cancer, you won't be happy as a cashier in a drugstore. If The Almighty gave you a brilliant mind, you're wasting your potential wallowing in front of a television screen.

Likewise, whenever a grounded flakefoot falcon looks at his scaly feet, he falls into a deep depressive state and loses all will to live. He thinks his life is worthless, and he's embarrassed for anyone to see him. Yet, the instant he spreads his dazzling golden wings and begins to fly—his own special talent, for no other bird can emulate the graceful and exquisite flight of a flakefoot—his entire outlook on life changes for the better. On the ground, a flakefoot is none other than a feathered sack of misery. In the air, he's the majestic avian king of the sky.

You and I are no different than a flakefoot falcon. When we identify and cultivate our own unique abilities, we not only survive, we unlock the doors to inner peace and success.

Can you imagine if Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder, both blind from birth, had dreamed of being fighter pilots? Their lives would have been a nightmare of frustration. Instead, they each developed their superb musical talents to bring joy to millions of people.

Likewise, if Franklin Delano Roosevelt had aspired to be an Olympic sprinter, his life would have been a complete waste. FDR's crippled legs didn't prevent him from being the only American president in history that served three terms in office. Roosevelt circumvented his physical weaknesses to develop his strength of character and qualities of leadership, to successfully lead his nation through the trying years of World War II.

Wait and see how your life improves once you start cultivating your own special abilities. You'll be a lot happier with yourself, and at peace with the world around you. Others will like you much more as well. Your studies, your job, and your family life will soar upward, just like a flakefoot falcon spreading its wings in the wind.

Until you've found that one special quality or talent of yours that sets you above and apart from everyone else, you haven't yet started to live a truly satisfying life.

The Creator outfits every human with an outstanding quality in a raw state waiting to be developed, like a muddy unpolished diamond deep inside a South African diamond mine. Yet, unlike the South African mine, you don't have to travel to the far corners of the world to discover *you*. The more you gain spiritual awareness, the more you'll become aware of yourself and of your potential. SA helps you discover those unique abilities buried deep inside of you.

During one of my lectures, a person once asked me if the fires of purgatory are for real. I answered with the following allegorical dramatization:

## The Heavenly Limelight

Imagine that your life in this world terminates, and you're carried up to a heavenly lecture hall. You are seated alone on center stage in the limelight, while thousands of eyes are watching you. Suddenly, the lights are switched off, and a projector illuminates a gigantic video screen behind you. Together with the thousands of observers, you turn around and see a movie about . . . you!

You recognize your parents, your house, your school, and your hometown. All of a sudden, the pictures become unfamiliar . . .

A narrator with a warm, rich, loving voice that makes your skin tingle begins to explain the scenes on the screen. You see yourself receiving a Presidential medal of honor for discovering a cure to cancer. Maybe you see yourself as the first special education teacher in the world to teach trigonometry to children with Downe's Syndrome. Or maybe you're leading your national gymnastics team to an Olympic gold medal. A different image might portray you as a benefactor signing a check to build an old-age home for penniless senior citizens.

The film is over. A bright spotlight shines on you. The voice returns, reverberating through loudspeakers in every corner of the lecture hall, and says, "That my son or daughter, is what you were destined to do with your life. Instead, you spent your time in idleness. You squandered your money on foolish short-term thrills. You wasted your razor-sharp mind sitting in front of a television and gossiping on the telephone. You never took stock in yourself. You neither discovered your outstanding qualities nor did you develop them . . ."

Thousands of eyes focus on you. You're devastated by the realization that you could have moved the universe. Instead, you wasted your potential on computer games, aimless surfing on the web, and soap operas. You misused your valuable energy. Rather than assuming your role as the king's prodigy, you acted like a simpleton. You're so embarrassed that you feel like a blowtorch is searing your face.

"That's the fire of purgatory," I answered.



Once you identify your good points, and begin to enhance them, you'll like yourself much more. I'll share a secret with you: The first thing I do in personal counseling is to try and make a quick and accurate identification of a client's strong points. So, get to work, dear friend; that diamond inside of you is waiting to be discovered.

***Lesson number two: Divide your weak points into two categories: First, those you have control of; and second, those you don't have control of. Do what you can to improve the weaknesses you can control.***

If you were a flakefoot falcon, your personal assessment inventory of talents and weaknesses would look like this:

<b>Talents</b>	<b>Controllable faults</b>	<b>Uncontrollable faults</b>
Flying ace	Periodic melancholy	Psoriasis on the legs
Master hunter	Embarrassed in public	*
Superb Eyesight	*	*
Inspiring	*	*
Family-oriented	*	*
Highly spiritual	*	*

Look at the amazing results in the above table: The falcon has a list of qualities twice as long as his list of faults. Moreover, out of all his faults, only one is out of his control! If I were counseling a flakefoot falcon, the first thing I would do after our initial get-acquainted session would be to draw up the above table.



Now, imagine that *you* are the emotional counselor of a flakefoot falcon. The bird has been suffering from severe depression, and has come to you for help. After interviewing the falcon, you fill in the above table. Here's what you tell the bird:

## **Your Advice to the Flakefoot Falcon**

**Uncontrollable faults:** Until veterinary science develops a cure for avian psoriasis, try not to think about your flaking legs. If you dream about being a peacock, a flamingo, or a fashion model for ladies' hosiery—forget it. Your good points vastly outweigh your sole uncontrollable weak point; focus on them, and you'll forget about the flaking feet. (*See the coming lesson for a continuation of this train of thought*).

**Controllable faults:** During our introductory meeting, Mr. Falcon, we concluded that the presence of other birds, animals,

or humans causes you extreme self-consciousness and embarrassment. I would suggest that you limit contact with other beings to a minimum, and thereby spare yourself the unnecessary anguish. You're a wonderful husband and father, as Mrs. Falcon confirms, so your family unit can accord you all the social satisfaction you need. If that's not enough, establish relationships with other flakefoot falcons in the area. Birds of a feather can always flock together with no anguish or embarrassment.

As for the melancholy, notice that you become depressed whenever you spend too much time on the ground or in the nest. Therefore, I suggest that you increase your airborne time by at least 15%. Bring your flight logbook to our next session, so that we can keep track of your progress . . . .



Dear reader, I'm so proud of you! Look what a fantastic counselor you are! What you just did for the flakefoot falcon, you can now do for your mate, your child, or your close friend. Better yet, you can draw up a table and assess yourself! You'll be amazed at the amount of anger, stress, and frustration that disappears from your life the minute you begin to honestly assess yourself.

For your convenience, here's a blank table for you to fill in. *I know you have many more good qualities than what I've allotted space for, but I don't want my esteemed publisher to think that I'm wasting space.*

## Your Personal Assessment Table

Talents	Controllable faults	Uncontrollable faults

Monitor your progress periodically. Wait and see how wonderfully you begin to channel your energies in the right directions. I'm positive that you're a winner, and that you'll be a tremendous success.

**Important! Be careful not to confuse uncontrollable faults with the controllable faults you can overcome with dedication and hard work.**

As a little boy in elementary school in the late 1950's, my hero was Mickey Mantle, centerfielder of the world-champion New York Yankees. Mickey suffered from osteomyelitis, a bone disease. As a child, doctors predicted that he'd never walk properly; yet, he turned out to be a swift outfielder and the perennial home-run king of the American league. His success had a high price tag: Before each game, he went through a lengthy ritual of taping his legs, and endured excruciating pain his entire baseball career. His biggest victory in life was overcoming the bone disease.

At this point, we'll flash back up to our heavenly lecture hall with the giant video screen.

You now see yourself on center stage in the limelight as a self-pitying wreck in a wheel chair, full of anger at yourself, self-pity, and resentment. The lights go off, the projector lights up the screen, and you see a ball clearing the 420-foot centerfield fence in Yankee Stadium, while 60,000 delirious fans jump to their feet. Casey Stengel, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Moose Skowron, Tony Kubek, Roger Maris, Clete Boyer, and Bobby Richardson meet you at home plate. The Yanks just captured another World Series title. You could have been Mickey Mantle . . . .

The doctors told my parents that I wouldn't be able to live without periodic adrenalin shots. The rising pollen count in the humid late summer of suburban Washington, D.C. would aggravate my hay fever, which in turn would trigger my asthma. On numerous occasions, my father, of blessed memory, would rush me—his choking and gasping son—to the nearest doctor or emergency room for an adrenalin injection.

Mickey Mantle inspired me. Just as he ran on his bad legs, I started running on my contracted lung passages. By age eighteen, the asthma was gone. Who knows how many other children across the nation were inspired by Mickey Mantle? His positive influence on an entire generation of American youth outshines his homerun and World Series titles.

If I hadn't have licked the asthma, I would have never been accepted in the army, much less Special Forces. Had I not experienced the ultimate high-stress situations of the army, I may have never developed the spiritual side of my life. Had I never developed the spiritual side of my life, I could never have written this book. Now, do you begin to understand the far-reaching influence that overcoming a seemingly uncontrollable handicap has on others?

Thanks, Mickey Mantle, wherever you are.

Sometimes differentiating between a controllable fault and an uncontrollable fault is difficult. When in doubt, ask a good Spiritual Awareness counselor for help; or, ask a Marine drill sergeant. Both of them can show you that you're capable of much more than you think you are.

The strongest power on earth is human will. You *can* if you *want*. — *The Melitzer Rebbe*

***Lesson number three: The weaknesses that are out of your control are a blessing in disguise, to help you make spiritual growth and to channel you toward your real purpose in life. Resenting those weaknesses destroy your inner peace and keep you away from the truth.***

For the sake of simplicity, we'll return to our example of the flakefoot falcon.

## **A No-nonsense Counseling Session with a Flakefoot Falcon**

The bird comes to us for another counseling session. Whenever our falcon friend looks at his flaking legs and feet, his heart breaks in two. On the ground, he's prone to anger and frustration. The worst thing he can do is to mope around constantly berate himself, "Why can't I have healthy legs and feet like all the other birds?"

Mr. Falcon, we tell him, you are not a run-of-the-mill bird; you are king of the sky. Rather than allow your anger and frustration to skyrocket, spread your wings and skyrocket yourself! When you're airborne, your problematic feet and legs are tucked away, and you don't even know they exist. In the air, your problem is neutralized, forgotten altogether!

The falcon looks me straight in the face with those piercing eyes of his, and says, "Lazer, it's easy for you to talk. You don't suffer from my problems!" Dejected, he sticks his head in the ground.

Sometimes, with certain clients, you have to employ a tough approach in counseling. "Listen up, flakefoot," I say in sergeant major's tone, "you're not an ostrich, so get your face out of the ground. The Almighty gave you a pair of sophisticated cameras in your eye sockets that any NASA spacecraft would be proud of. Your head should be way up in the air, because you're the king of the sky. Kings don't berate themselves."

The tough approach is working, so I continue: "Do you think you can run the world better than God can? OK, let's see: If to-

morrow morning, you'd wake up with healthy and attractive feet and legs, you'd end up clowning around in the treetops with all the pigeons and crows. Do you think The Almighty needs another crow or pigeon, and one less flakefoot falcon? Do you think you'd be better off prancing around the pond like a swan or a flamingo? Would you prefer to be a Canadian goose and free game during hunting season?"

Sometimes, a counselor can literally feel God putting the right words in his mouth. I drive the point home, and tell the falcon, "Your apparent handicap is really a blessing! Those flaky feet of yours keep you away from the chirpy little gossips around the pond and in the park. Your avian psoriasis forces you to cultivate your flying acumen. Thanks to your flaking feet, you're the undisputed king of the sky. You birds are nearly extinct as is. Do you know how many tourists and birdwatchers you've inspired? Have you ever heard of a crow inspiring somebody? Come on, man—I mean falcon—cut the self-pity. Here, you've got clearance on runway two-five-niner; get up in the sky and show us your stuff."

The falcon makes his grand exit out of the open window, soars upward, and salutes us with his golden wings.

### ***Lesson number four: Judge yourself fairly.***

Let's now focus our attention on you, dear reader. Do you remember the lessons we learned in the previous chapter, about judging other people fairly? You're just as important as the next person, so you deserve a fair trial in your own mental courtroom. Make sure that the attorney for the defense inside your head knows how to represent you. If he's incapable of presenting all your attributes, then I'll be happy to defend you. I can easily compose a long list of your superb qualities.

Now that you've learned to differentiate between those faults that are out of your control, and those faults that are within your control, you can begin to judge yourself fairly. Giving yourself a fair trial is the key to attaining inner peace, to overcoming guilt complexes, and to uprooting the anger you harbor at yourself.

Let's see how, with the following case study:

## **The Unlikely Inmate.**

Dave Cummings, a successful investment broker, washed and dressed in eight minutes, while his wife prepared coffee and sandwiches for him. He grabbed his attaché case, the keys to the