I am indebted to my colleague Rabbi Ed Feinstein of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California who edited a book of beautiful stories called “Capturing the Moon”. Over the years, I have used so many of his stories that pretty soon, I’m going to have to find a new source for inspirational stories. This story is called “Finding God.”

There was once a boy who asked questions. From the time he was very young, he questioned everyone about everything. His questions never stopped; every answer only gave birth to a new question. He began asking about small things. And as he grew older, his questions grew bigger. So, by the time he was a young man, he sought the biggest answers of all. But there was no one in his small village who could answer those questions. "You must go and see the rebbe," his father told him. "He will help you find your answers." The rebbe was a great teacher. He knew the answers to the biggest of questions. He even knew the secrets of God. So the boy's mother packed his bag, and with a hug of love, they sent him on his way.

The boy arrived in the rebbe's town, and found his way to the rebbe’s school. He listened intensely to the rebbe's lessons, thrilled at the prospect of finally finding answers. At last, he was shown in to see the rebbe.

"Great Rebbe, please teach me about God!" the boy pleaded. "I want to learn the secrets of God."

The rebbe stared at the boy's face for some time, and then finally responded. "I will teach you. But tell me, do you have a place to stay?"

"A place to stay?" the boy asked. "I don't need a place to stay! I want to master the secrets of God!"

"Yes, of course. But first, go and find a place to stay. And then we'll learn the secrets."

The boy left the rebbe's presence. He wasn't happy about the delay, but he knew he must obey the rebbe.

He scoured the town, searching for a hotel, a room, a loft, even a spare bed. There was nothing available. It was a small town. No one had a room to spare. If he wanted to stay in the town, he would have to build a place for himself. So he found a good-hearted carpenter who offered to share his skills, and lend his tools. And the boy set to work building a home. He didn't know if he could do it, since he had never built anything before. But he knew he must try. For only then would the Rebbe share his secrets.

It wasn't easy. Each time he put up a wall, it fell down. And each time he covered the roof, it fell in. But he persisted. Finally, the walls stayed up. And the roof stayed up. And the windows and doors opened and shut. And the boy realized, that he had built himself a home! It wasn't big. It wasn't pretty. But it was cozy, and warm, and it was his! He never thought he

could do such a thing, but he'd done it. So he returned to the rebbe.

"Rebbe, I built myself a home. I would never have believed I could do such a thing ... but I mastered the skills, and now I have a home. Now, please, teach me the secrets of God!"
The rebbe looked into the boy's face for some time. Finally he said, "Of course, But first, tell me, do you have a job?"

"A job?" the boy asked. "No, I came to learn the secrets. I have no need for a job!"

"Go and find a job, and then we'll have plenty of time to learn together!"

The boy left the rebbe. He knew he must obey if he ever hoped to find the secrets. He began to look for a job.

This was a farming village. Everyone farmed their own land. So the boy began a farm behind his home. He had never done farm work before. But he learned quickly and he worked very hard. He planted fruits and vegetables, he tilled fields of grain, he milked cows and gathered eggs. And finally, when the harvest came, he was amazed. He never thought that he could grow anything. Suddenly, there was so much that he had brought from the earth. He gathered a basket of produce, and brought it to the rebbe.

"Rebbe, you told me to find a place to stay, so I built a home. You told me to get a job, so I learned to farm. Look, I bring you of the fruits of my labors! Now, please share with me the secrets I have waited so long to hear!"

The rebbe looked long into the boy's face. Finally he asked, "Are you married?"

"Married?!" asked the boy with obvious frustration. "Why should I be married? I came to learn the great secrets, not to get married!"

"Of course," said the rebbe, "but first, go get married. Then we'll learn the secrets."

The boy was frustrated. He was angry. But what was he to do? How could he argue with the rebbe?

In the town, there was a girl he liked, and he suspected that she liked him. So he began to spend time with her. They took walks at sunset. And picnics in the meadow. They talked about their dreams. And they fell in love. In his whole life, he never knew he could love someone as much as he loved her. He asked her to marry him, and she asked him to marry her. Their wedding was simple, but warmed by their love. She moved into his cozy home, and they shared the fruits of their labors.

The boy returned to the rebbe. "Rebbe, you told me to find a place to live, so I built a home. You told me to find a job, so I

began a farm. Then, you asked me to get married. I found a woman. I never knew I could love anyone as much as I love her. We are married. Now, rebbe, please, teach me the secrets."
"Do you have children?" the rebbe asked.

Somehow, the boy expected this. He wasn't nearly as frustrated as before. This time, he just smiled. "No, not yet, but if you tell me...I will obey."

"Good," said the rebbe, "go have children, then come back, and I will teach you!"

In his whole life, he never thought he could love someone as much as he loved his wife. He never thought he could work so hard as he worked on his farm. And he never thought he would feel as good as the day his home was complete. But then their children came. And the boy discovered that he could love even deeper, and work even harder, and feel more complete than he ever had before. He cared for his family and gave them everything he had and everything he made. And yet, he took back more happiness than he had ever known.
So he returned to the rebbe.

"Great Rebbe, when I came to you years ago, I asked you to teach me the secrets of God. You told me to find a place to stay, you told me to find a job, you told me to get married, then you told me to have children. Now, Rebbe, I am ready. I have done everything you asked. Now, please, teach me the secrets of God."

The rebbe stared into the boy's face. "Not yet. You're not ready yet."

"But what else do you require?" the boy cried, "What else?" "Soon you will know." And with that, the rebbe turned back to his books.

Soon after, a messenger came from the boy's village with an urgent message. His grandfather was ill. He needed to return home at once.

The boy rushed home. He found his grandfather weary and sick. He sat with his grandfather and they talked, sharing all that life had taught them. And when the grandfather realized that his grandson had grown into a man, learned and wise, he smiled weakly and fell asleep, and peacefully he died with his grandson beside him.

The boy cried with a sadness he had never felt before. He loved his grandfather, and missed him so much. He knew no way to escape his loneliness and pain. How could he ever feel good again? How could he ever find a way back to life?

But as the days went by, sweet memories of his grandfather replaced of some of his pain. And he found the way back to life, to his family, to his happiness, to the rebbe.

"Great Rebbe, I loved my grandfather so much, I never thought I could say good-bye. I never thought I could ever overcome my

sadness and pain. But my grandfather taught me to love life as he did. And so, I have found a way to remember him and yet be happy again. Am I ready now to share the secrets of God?"

"Yes, my son. Now you are ready to hear the secrets." The rebbe took a deep breath. Then got up, and walked to the window. He stared at the sunset outside. "You came here years ago looking for a God outside yourself -- far away, up in the universe. But the best place to find God is within: in your own ability to grow, to learn, to build, to produce, to love, to share, to care, and to overcome life's pain. You need no more secrets. You have already found the God you came looking for. My son, you already know the secrets."

The boy listened to each word. He knew that the rebbe was right. Had he heard these words years before, when he first arrived, he would have slammed his fists down in frustration. But now, having done all the rebbe asked -- having built a home, and made a living, and loved a wife, and cared for a family, and having said good bye to his grandfather, he knew inside that the rebbe was right. All the secrets he needed were his already.

The boy remained the rebbe's student and disciple.

And when the rebbe was old and in need of rest, he turned to the boy and appointed him Rebbe in his place.

The new rebbe humbly assumed his position. Soon his reputation spread far and wide throughout the land: The new rebbe was wise beyond compare. He knew all the answers to all the questions. He could answer even the biggest of questions ... he knew the secrets of God.

People came from all over seeking the rebbe's wisdom. And when any young person would come, and ask the rebbe, "Teach me, please, the secrets of God!" The Rebbe would look into his face for a long while, and then ask, "Do you have a place to stay? Go, find a place, then we'll share the secrets!"

That is the story as told by Rabbi Ed Feinstein.

Many people think that religion is about secrets – secrets to life, to happiness, to success. Wisdom isn't a secret. And it's hard to get. It cannot be purchased, or stolen, or read in a book. It is acquired by experiencing life and thinking deeply about what life comes to teach.

As we usher in the new Jewish year. None of us is the same as we were last year at this time; certainly not last year, our world has changed so much and we have been changed by it. And none of us will be the same next year, when, God willing we welcome yet another New Year. In the year ahead we will, no doubt, experience happiness and sorrow, highs and lows, joys and disappointments. Like the young man in the story who asked the rabbi to reveal to him the secrets of God, the lessons of life and their deepest meaning, we will only come to know

truth and meaning by living life to the fullest and being open to spiritual growth and self-improvement.