

A Higher Calling

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“The things that make me different are the things that make me” – A. A. Milne

Individuality is one of life’s most prized virtues. Imagine how boring everything would be if everyone were the same. A world of clones would not even be worth living in; after all, what would distinguish us from others while leaving room for our own existence? Variety creates the conditions for us to appreciate the gift of life.

This concept is true of the entire creation. Whereas before Creation, everything was one, God made room for each of us to come into existence. This can be compared to two sides. The right side is straight – it represents God’s Oneness, and there is no room for anything else but Him. The left side is diverse and creative. There are many choices and distinctions,

but there is also the potential for lies and fabrications.

As beautiful as our individuality is, the left side by its very nature gives way to freedom of choice and the possibility of being completely blinded from the Source of life. We are surrounded by a society in which falsehood is ever so prominent and the choices are easily accessible and endless. How can we stay focused? How can we gain access to the right side, the Source of life itself, the One and Only God?

Our existence in this world can be compared to the life of a slave. We are born into an imperfect and impoverished, limited state. But we want to experience something endlessly higher and more meaningful. The Torah therefore commands the slave to be circumcised.

Man was created in the image of God. His body represents a perfect figure, but he is born with one extra part, the foreskin that must be removed by way of circumcision. The foreskin serves no purpose other than representing this world's potential for multiplicity and, subsequently, falsehood. Therefore, it must be removed. By doing so, the slave reaches a higher calling and becomes connected to God's Oneness. For this reason, Jewish law dictates that the slave must refrain from violating the Torah's negative commandments.

Just as we circumcise the extraneous foreskin, Rebbe Nachman teaches that when we speak words of truth, we also become elevated and are able to restore and reconnect this world of multiplicity to its origin of Oneness. The veil of falsehood is removed from our eyes, and we can finally experience the Essence of Creation.

Yet the Torah forbids freeing the newly-elevated slave. "You shall hold on to them as an inheritance for your children after you, as acquired property, and they shall serve you forever" (Leviticus 25:46). Why? Now that he has been elevated from his base slave state, shouldn't he be allowed to live a

life of freedom, a life of spiritual ecstasy? Why must he remain enslaved?

God created this world in its current state, and wishes it to remain this way. It is our job to rise up, to elevate our lives and reconnect with God's Oneness. In order for this to happen, while at the same time maintaining the word's existence, we must all experience constant states of highs and lows. This is our Master's wish and desire. In His great kindness, He knows it is not desirable for us to be completely free. However, by knowing that this is for our ultimate benefit, we can gain the patience and resolve to weather the ups and downs and serve our Master and Father with dedication and love. We can know what this world is all about, and realize that we are not really slaves at all.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Avadim 2