

# Am I a Turkey?

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One of Rebbe Nachman's most famous and amusing tales is "The Turkey Prince." It goes like this:

A prince once became crazy and thought he was a turkey. He felt compelled to sit without clothing under the table, pecking at bones and pieces of bread like a turkey. All the royal physicians gave up hope of curing him of this madness. The king grieved tremendously.

A sage arrived and said, "I will undertake to cure him." The sage undressed and sat under the table, next to the prince, picking crumbs and bones. "Who are you?" asked the prince. "What are you doing here?" "And you?" replied the sage. "What are you doing here?"

"I am a turkey," said the prince.

"I'm also a turkey," answered the sage.

They sat together like this for some time, until they became good friends. One day, the sage signaled the king's servants

to throw him shirts. He said to the prince, "What makes you think that a turkey can't wear a shirt? You can wear a shirt and still be a turkey." With that, the two of them put on shirts.

The sage continued in this manner until they were both completely dressed. Then he signaled for regular food from the table. The sage asked the prince, "What makes you think you will stop being a turkey if you eat good food? You can eat whatever you want and still be a turkey!" They both ate the food.

Finally the sage said, "What makes you think a turkey must sit under the table? Even a turkey can sit at the table." The sage continued in this manner until the prince was completely cured.

This tale begs an obvious question. The sage was obviously very clever; couldn't he have just sat the prince down and explained to him logically that he wasn't a turkey?

The turkey is representative of our animalistic desires. The Tanya says that a book describing the evil nature of our animal soul would take some 500 years to complete! The overwhelming strength of our urges convinces us that we are nothing better than a turkey, pecking around at whatever exciting things we see and want. We feel trapped by our physical cravings and desires. How do we get out?

The prince represents our holy soul. Our soul is a portion of the Divine and our true identity. Describing its holy essence would take all of eternity! The sage teaches the prince that for him to realize his essence does not require tackling his ego and selfishness head-on. In fact, confronting with his urges might pull him even deeper into their lure. Rather, the proper approach is to realize that even though he may think he is an animal, and even if he may have behaved like an animal, he can still serve God and choose to do good. The more he sees he is capable of wanting to do good and acting in positive

ways, the more the prince becomes convinced that though he was born with many unfulfilled lusts and thoughts, they are not him and he need not take them so seriously.

We descend into this world to travel through a spiritual desert of tests, challenges and pitfalls. Our parashah states, "These are the accounts of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle..." (Exodus 38:21). The word "Tabernacle" is repeated twice to teach us that it is as if there were two Tabernacles, one when it was assembled and one when it was disassembled and, later, buried. The Tabernacle is always holy and will always protect the Jewish People throughout our travels. By desiring to do good and to be close to God, even when we feel no better than a turkey, we can draw down God's Presence and protection so we can eventually emerge from this desert in a sane and whole way. Amen!

*Based on a lecture by R' Pinchas Bunker and Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5*