

Happy birthday to me

written by Ozer Bergman

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A birthday is like—or is—a Rosh HaShanah It's a time to judge thyself. "How did I do this year? In fact, how've I been doing in life?!"

Fifty-plus years holed up in this body, hiding out and biding my time. Doing what? Waiting for what? Fifty-plus years of "eating potatoes," as the Breslover old-timers used to say. But how much time have I used? How much time have I squandered? (Truly a polite word in comparison to any of the more colorful ones I remember from the streets of New York.) So many dead days, some that were shot in the head, others that bled to death.

If my days were dead, lifeless, so was I. What's worse, if I haven't figured it out by now, if I can't stop the bleeding, what's the point in trying any more?

The Rebbe (Reb Nachman z"l) says a broken heart is good, for an hour a day, but not more (Likutey Moharan II, Lesson #24). And giving up is *never* good.

Reb Noson of Teverya* writes in one of his letters: the same Rebbe Nachman z"l who taught us to break our hearts for an hour a day in *hisbodedus*, also told us to be upbeat the rest of the day. So if you practice the Rebbe's *eitzah* (suggestion) of *hisbodedus*, practice his *eitzah* of *simcha* (being upbeat).

Rosh HaShanah is a time for *teshuvah* (return to God). A birthday must also be.

I know—I believed it and have since experienced it—that what the Rebbe says is true: A day one does *teshuvah* is a day above time (*The Alef-Bet Book, Teshuvah* B:1). It's the "return one day before your death" that the Rebbe encouraged us to do

(*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #288 on *Avot* 2:10); and it's "an hour of return and good works in this world is more beautiful than the entire World to Come" (*ibid.* 4:22).

Thank God, I've had some hours like that. I can still live. I can still give life. It's still possible to raise my past from the dead. Amen!

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