

Pure Desire

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Rebbe Nachman told a tale:

Once a king sent three of his servants to deliver a secret message to another king in a distant land. On the way, they had to pass through lands that were at war with their king.

The first messenger was clever enough to conceal his purpose completely. He passed through the hostile land without them ever realizing that he was carrying a secret message.

The second messenger started through the unfriendly country and was discovered. The people realized that he was carrying a secret message and were going to force him to reveal it. But through his wisdom and endurance, he was able to escape without revealing the message.

The third messenger was also discovered. Realizing that he, too, was bearing a secret message, they imprisoned him, and subjected him to all kinds of torture. They tortured him in the cruelest ways possible, but despite his great agony, he

refused to tell them anything. He withstood the test without yielding his secret. They finally realized that their tortures were to no avail, and assumed that they were mistaken and he actually had no secret. They let him go, and he passed through their land, delivering his message to the king.

When they returned, everyone had an opinion as to which of the three deserved the greatest reward. Some said that the first was most deserving, for he acted cleverly enough to hide his secret completely. Others gave the most credit to the second, for he had already been discovered, and still was smart enough to escape. But the king said that the third messenger deserved the greatest reward of them all. He had already been caught in their net. He certainly also wanted to hide his purpose, but he was not successful. After being captured, he underwent every possible torture and torment. If he would have revealed even one secret, he would have received the greatest honors. Still, he withstood the test, revealing nothing. Therefore, his reward is above all the rest.

The Rebbe himself did not reveal who the third messenger was. Perhaps the answer to this riddle is alluded to in our *parashah*.

Rebbe Nachman was known to constantly exude the virtues of mustering our desire and longing for spirituality and Godliness. He explained that our main possessions are willpower and the desire for holiness. The Rebbe's understanding of the value of desire is more relevant today than ever before. Just as our People have been in a prolonged state of exile, waiting for the arrival of the Mashiach and being subjected to the desires of the nations of the world, we find ourselves subjected to a prolonged, difficult and personal spiritual exile as well. "From the day that the Holy Temple was destroyed, there is no day whose cursedness does not exceed that of the previous day" (*Sotah* 49a).

We are besieged by personal challenges relating to our

livelihood, relationships and health, and at the same time tested with spiritual slumber and disinterest. These issues squeeze the life out of us, paralyzing our hearts and minds. What are we left with in the end?

But, in fact, the most precious thing in the universe remains: our desire, hope and aspiration for God are never taken from us. Sometimes a parent may temporarily push away an ungrateful child in order to awaken the child's feelings for that parent. God wants us to tune into our souls and realize our ingrained, incredible yearning for Him. The Talmud teaches, "Would God not help him [man], his evil spirit would override him" (*Kiddushin* 30b). Yet if it is really God Who is helping us succeed, what are our actions worth? More than anything else, God values our pure desire; the end result is within God's own plans.

The third messenger is the simple Jew. He may have been captured and tormented, he may not have been clever enough to evade or even escape from his issues, but in spite of it all, he never gives up his pure desire to fulfill the will of the King. Rebbe Nachman reveals that he is the one who is most precious. Though on the outside he may have been dirtied, and certainly has been shown no respect, the King knows that his valor has been actualized above the rest.

"But despite all this, while they are in the land of their enemies, I will not despise them, nor will I reject them to annihilate them" (Leviticus 26:44). The *Zohar* explains that the Hebrew word *l'KaLotam* (to annihilate them) is missing the letter *vav*, hinting at the word *KaLah* (desire). I will never despise or reject you, says God. Why? Because even when you are captured in the land of the enemy, you continue to desire Me.

May the prolonged desire and hopes of all of us be collected and recognized by God, and may we all return to our Land and His service very soon. Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pidyon Bekhor 5