

The Story of Our Lives: The Lost Princess (#12)

written by Yaakov Klein
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Hi there, friends! In the previous lesson, we watched in horror as our hero made a terrible error. Mere moments away from completing the requirements necessary to free the lost princess, he fell prey to the seductions of the yetzer hara and ate an apple from one of the trees along the path to the palace. Immediately, he fell into a deep slumber and lay sleeping for a very long time.

The servant tried to shake him, but he would not wake.

In a previous lesson (*The Viceroy's Three Requests*), we learned that the servant of the viceroy represents the power of the intellect. When the tzaddik within falls asleep along the journey toward discovering the fire of youth in avodas

Hashem, the mind tries to rouse the inner viceroy to his mission yet again. The servant cannot continue the journey to free the lost princess alone. A dry, intellectual understanding of the importance of Judaism and the value of a life spent serving Hashem usually cannot put a person in touch with the lost princess of his life. *“Vata yata hayom”*, *“You shall know, today”* (Devarim 4:39) is not enough. In order to truly get in touch with avodas Hashem in the most real way, the next step is crucial *“vahasheivos el livavechah”*, *“and you shall draw it down to your heart”*. (Ibid) The channel between the mind and the heart is the inner tzaddik, the viceroy. Only that inner point of holiness and true kedusha, which knows what it means to be in the presence of God and the vanity *“in comparison”* of any other pursuit, can use the knowledge of the mind to set the heart aflame with the fire of youthful passion, excitement, and vitality. Still, though the servant cannot do it alone, he does his part in attempting to wake the viceroy from his slumber and remind him of the task at hand. Unfortunately, he is unsuccessful.

After some time, the viceroy awoke from his slumber and asked his servant “Where in the world am I?”

The moment the inner tzaddik wakes up from his deep sleep he asks one simple but incredibly powerful question. *“Heichan ani ba’olam?”*, he cries, *“Where in the world am I?”* It is perfectly clear to any student of Rebbe Nachman’s works that the viceroy is not simply wondering where he is currently located in a geological sense. Rather, the viceroy is responding to his lowly spiritual standing. This question bursts forth from the deepest essence of the viceroy’s soul, piercing the heavens with its anguish: *“Where in the world am I? Look what has happened to me! I have fallen so far from my Maker, so alienated from my deepest essence, so removed from my mission in this world!”* In this cry, the viceroy expresses his pain and his regret over having lost touch with

his true nature “*where in the world am I*” he feels that he has lost touch with his *“I”*, that he is floating out into the open sea, lost and alone. Indeed, the only way to anchor himself and attempt to regain his footing is by asking this very question. Notice that in phrasing this question the viceroy doesn’t ask “how did I get here?” or “what will I do now”. The question “*where in the world am I*” doesn’t concern itself with the past or the future. It relates solely to the immediate present: I need to regain my sense of direction. Expressing his disbelief at how he has fallen and failed, the viceroy succeeds in reminding himself of who he truly is and of the exalted nature of the mission he has undertaken.

By asking “*Where in the world am I?*”, the viceroy contrasts the depravity of his current state (*“where in the world”*) with the sweet holiness of his true essence (*“I”*). Because he assesses the damage of his misdeed by holding it up to the light of his true self, the viceroy is able to appreciate the gravity of his mistake without falling into despair. Phrasing the question in this manner, he is reminded that his act in the passion of the moment does not define his essence. Though he has made a mistake and will certainly suffer consequences, he realizes that it doesn’t have any bearing on who he truly is and the path toward his shining goal which yet lies before him.

Rebbe Nachman uses the nuanced way the viceroy words his heavy question to teach us a tremendous rule in avodas Hashem: an error never results in the termination of our holy mission. Though we may fall, we never shatter; our light may be dimmed but it is never extinguished. When we wake from our spiritual slumber and behold the devastation around us, our first question should not be “*Who have I become?*”. In order for us to heal, we must instead ask “*Where in the world am I?*”, lamenting our current state while never for a moment losing sight of our goals and the all-encompassing mission for

which we were sent to this world.

This question is a very big tool in avodas Hashem. Indeed, it is a familiar phrase in the circles of Breslover chassidim until today. A familiar scene: A skinny chassid with a small blond beard engages in Hisbodedus, a one on one conversation with the Master of the world, in the forest behind his home. He nervously twirls his long payos around his finger and paces back and forth, at a loss for words. Suddenly, a long sigh escapes his lips and he lifts his eyes to the cloudless blue sky. “Oyyy!” he softly cries, “Abba shebaShamayim! Father in heaven! *Heichan ani bâ’olam?*! Where in the world am I? *Heichan ani bâ’olam?*! I am so far from my true mission, I have strayed so far from the path of light and truth! How long will I continue to forsake you, Father in heaven? How long will I turn my back in the well of living waters and drink from this dirty pit of lowliness and filth? Is there where a soul like mine, hewn from the kisei hakavod belongs? Is this what You sent me to this world for? I am ready to return to your loving arms, my dear Father! I am ready to stand up from this place and continue my journey toward closeness with You!”

The honesty, simplicity, and humility packed into this little question give it incredible power. It is a wonderful tool to use along the path in our own search for the lost princess of avodas Hashem.

The servant told him what had happened. “You slept for a very long time” for many years. I survived by eating the fruit.

Although the intellect was unable to wake the inner tzaddik, when the viceroy awakens on his own, the intellect reminds him of what had happened. The intellect tells the point of purity that while he slept, he continued to eat the fruits, a reference to the Torah and mitzvos. Even though his service was devoid of true focus and holy intention, it was enough to

keep the fire burning while the inner tzaddik slept.

The viceroy was very upset at himself. He went to the palace and found the princess.

Even though he is overcome by the immensity of his error, the viceroy continues fighting toward his goal. As his question “Where in the world am I?” indicated, the viceroy’s sorrow over his current spiritual state has not washed away his faith in the mission he has undertaken and his ability to triumph despite his failure. Though he spends some time thinking about the damage he has done, he does not allow those thoughts to drag him under. When he feels he has mourned enough, he removes those thoughts from his mind and pushes on, eager to correct his error.

So many times throughout life we squander the opportunities Hashem gives us. Each of us find ourselves, from time to time, in the viceroy’s situation, crushed by the weight of a misdeed and the chance we missed. The question is, what do we do now? Where do we go from here? In this story, Rebbe Nachman is teaching us that we must be like the viceroy. Acutely aware of just how destructive his eating the apple had been for his entire mission, the viceroy finds the inner strength, the “Azus d’Kedusha” the Holy Stubbornness Rebbe Nachman so often spoke about “to get back up and face the princess. Uncomfortable as he knows their meeting will be, he knows it is what he needs to do. Moping around will not help anyone. He must forge onward and find out what to do now, in this moment. This attitude is so fundamentally unique to the Breslover path to serving God. Humility, simplicity, courage, determination, focus, clarity, honesty, and faith – all pillars of the Breslov way – meet in the line of our amazing story. It is something to keep in mind and to strive for, ceaselessly.

See you next time!