

# The Story of Our Lives: The Lost Princess (#6)

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## ***The Side Path to Spiritual Success***

Hi there, friends! In our previous lesson, we learned about the three requests made by the viceroy (the untouched point of holiness within) before setting out to search for the lost princess. Armed with a servant (healthy powers of intellect), a horse (physical health), and money for expenses (financial stability), the viceroy embarks on an epic journey to an unknown destination, determined to discover the whereabouts of the lost princess and bring her home to safety.

***The viceroy traveled here and there for a long time through deserts, fields, and forests. He searched for her for a very***

## ***long time.***

The tzaddikim of Breslov teach that the deserts, fields, and forests through which the viceroy first searches, in vain, hint to three major stages in the process of discovering the lost princess in our own lives.

A ***desert*** is a place of desolation and very little growth. It is a place which conjures King David's brokenhearted cries, "*My soul is like parched land for You*", (Tehillim 143:6) and "*My soul thirsts for G-d*" (Ibid 63:1). The heart is closed, the mind is numb. And the parched earth, barren of life, seems to stretch on forever. The desert is a necessary stop on the search for the lost princess. Our sages teach us that all beginnings are hard (Rashi to Shemos 19:5); one does not attain spiritual illumination in one day. The main thing is to move on, to keep on going. To persevere until we enter the next stage, until we finally encounter the field.

The ***field*** hints to the second stage of the process. A field is a place of growth and production, of healthy crops and lush vegetation. However, the field it is a place of tremendous toil. Though at this stage, we begin to witness a change coming over our existence, it is only by way of strenuous work and persistent effort. "*Those who plant with tears reap with joy*" (Tehillim 126:5) sang David Hamelech; any fruit we may cultivate in the field is surely that of our own labor. Still, though the field of growth is a positive and transformative experience, the princess is still nowhere to be found, and the viceroy must move on.

The next place the viceroy searches is in the ***forest***. The forest is a place of incredible growth and development and hints to spiritual bounty and success. Kabbalistically, the forest represents the powers of intellect and the ability of the human mind to contemplate lofty spiritual matters. After a long time in the field of toil and labor, a Jew is elevated to a realm of clarity where it is easy for him to ponder the

spiritual nature of the world and his divine mission within it. Still, Rebbe Nachman teaches that this is not yet the ultimate. It is possible for a Jew to spend all his life plumbing the depths of spiritual philosophy and halachic intricacies and remain disconnected from his princess, from the vitality, joy, and youth which a true relationship with Hashem engenders. The viceroy, acutely aware of this, continues his search.

***Finally, when traveling through the desert,***

Wait a minute! Wasn't the viceroy just in the forest of spiritual success? Didn't we say that he had attained a profound clarity into the spirituality that pulses within everything physical? How did our hero get back to the desert of spiritual desolation? The answer is that the growth process is a multi-tiered system. There are many segments along the path toward finding the lost princess of our lives, each containing the aspects of "desert", "field", and "forest". After spending much time in the forest of the first segment, we proceed onward – to the desert of the second segment. Working our way up to the forest of the second segment, we proceed yet again, only to enter into the desert of the third segment, and the pattern continues. Oftentimes, as we leave the forest of the lower level and enter the desert of the higher level, we are convinced that we have had a devastating fall right back to square one. In Likutei Moharan, Rebbe Nachman teaches us that this is a major mistake. These are his holy words. *"And the chassidim oftentimes err in this matter, for it suddenly appears as if they have fallen from avodas Hashem, but in truth this is not a descent at all! It is only that they need to proceed from level to level..."* (Likutei Moharan 25:5) Though in entering the desert once more it may appear that all our effort has gone to waste and that we are right back where we started, this couldn't be further than the truth! On the contrary! Our re-entry to the level of desert is oftentimes a sign that we have progressed to the next major

segment of growth. Interestingly enough, it is in the *desert* of a higher level, not the *forest*, that the viceroy begins to make real progress.

***He saw a path to the side, and thought it over. "Since I have traveled for so long in the desert and I cannot find her, let me follow this path. Perhaps it will bring me to an inhabited area."***

Finding this path is the first breakthrough in the viceroy's journey. It leads him directly to the place where the princess is being held. What is this path, and what is the significance of it's being "to the side"? Though the general guidelines of the Torah, the 613 mitvos, are binding upon all Jews equally, there is much room for individualism in avodas Hashem. The holy Zohar teaches that each Jewish soul is sourced in one of the Torah's 600,000 letters, each different from the next, each with its personal path to spiritual success. While we may be doing everything right "by the book" and walking along the universal path of Torah and mitzvos in the aspect of "***d'racheha darchei noam***", our avodas Hashem truly comes to life when we make it our own and encounter the aspect of "***v'chol n'sivoseha shalom***" (See Malbim to Mishlei 3:17)

When it comes to limud haTorah, Chazal stress the importance of finding the portion of Torah that speaks to our individual soul (Avodah Zarah 19a, see Shevet Mussar, Chapter 1, *V'Im Amor Yomar* and Oros HaTorah 9:6,12 and 10:14). Though our yeshivos traditionally follow a set curriculum comprised of segments of Gemara and Halacha, as one grows in maturity and becomes attuned to the yearnings of his soul he must search for the specific area of Torah that feeds his personal flame of connection. Whether it be the new vistas of Aggadah, Chassidus, Mussar, Machshava, or areas of halacha which are not as widely studied, we must search for our "path to the side". Just as making Torah study a personal and individualized process of discovery is an important step in the process of rediscovering the princess of passion and

excitement in our service of Hashem, the same applies in all areas of our yiddishkeit. We must search for the *mitzvos*, *minhagim*, and *hanhagos* that we feel most connected with and build on them, taking special care to fully involve ourselves with those things. A particular yom tov, a particular tefillah, a particular gathering of Jews for a *tisch* or *farbrengen*; the opportunities are truly endless. Finding our personal “path to the side” in avodas Hashem is imperative if we are to discover our lost princess.

A second and perhaps clearer interpretation of this “path to the side” sees it as referring to “Hisbodedus”, personal prayer in one’s own words and language, an avodah upon which Rebbe Nachman placed tremendous focus. In Likutei Moharan (Tinyana 97), Rebbe Nachman teaches that just as well-known roads are often stalked by thieves who wait in hiding for the unassuming passerby, the general road of our standardized prayers is stalked by all kinds of damaging angels which seek to prevent them from rising to the proper place. Therefore, just as one who wants to avoid the danger of being ambushed and robbed must take a hidden path which is not well known at all, it is similarly beneficial to take the hidden path of hisbodedus, setting time for personal and unscripted prayer, so as to slip past the negative forces unnoticed. The connection between this teaching and the “path to the side” taken by the viceroy is obvious. Rebbe Nachman is teaching that setting time each day to talk to Hashem in your own words and pouring out your heart to Him as you would to your very best friend is the path that will surely lead you to your lost princess. While there are so many benefits to this wonderful practice about which Rebbe Nachman (and many other tzaddikim) spoke so highly, it is, on a most basic level, the easiest way to build a deeply personal relationship with the Master of the world. It is this personal element stressed in both interpretations of the “path to the side” which plays a major role in the search for the lost princess.

***And he walked for a very long time.***

For the third time in as many lines, Rebbe Nachman stresses the lengthy nature of this journey to ourselves. Nothing of any worth ever comes easy. Even when the viceroy finds his personal “path to the side” after so much time traveling through the deserts, fields, and forests of personal development, he still has a long way to go; a way fraught with dangers, obstacles, and failures, and yet, as Rebbe Nachman has assured us, a way to ultimate triumph. See you next time!