

Rebbe Nachman's
Tale of the
Turkey Prince

A Therapeutic Journey Through
the Loss of Identity, Madness,
and the Rediscovery of Self

R' JOEY ROSENFELD

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
The Torah Beneath the Table	2
Rebbe Nachman's Tale of the Turkey Prince and the Secret of Healing	
The Descent of the Prince	5
The Failure of Help	9
From פירורים to חתיכות, Fragments to Fractals	15
מי and מה: The Crisis of Authenticity	18
The Patience of the Tzaddik	22
The Birth of the Wise Turkey	24
The First Garment	26
From the Heart to Habit	29
When the Healing Moves Inside	31
Returning Without Going Backward	34
The Meaning of Complete Healing	37
Wisdom That Can Enter Foolishness	39
Slowly Slowly, Little by Little	42
The Torah That Exists Beneath the Table	46

The Torah Beneath the Table

Rebbe Nachman's Tale of the Turkey Prince and the Secret of Healing

Rebbe Nachman's Maaseh M'Hindik, the story of the Turkey Prince, is a story about the instability of identity and the strange forms that healing must sometimes take when a person can no longer inhabit the world as he once did. It is a story about what happens when the inherited structures of selfhood collapse, when the language through which a person once understood himself no longer feels true, and when the very demand to return to normalcy becomes another expression of the distance between the person and those attempting to help him.

Yet beneath all of this, the maaseh is ultimately a story of *refuah*. Its radical claim is that the deepest healing does not always take place through eliminating the condition that appears broken. Sometimes healing begins when a person discovers that the place he has experienced as evidence of his brokenness can itself become the site from which a deeper and more integrated form of life emerges.

The story therefore unfolds around two locations: the table and the space beneath the table. The table represents the ordered world, the realm in which identity and behavior correspond, in which a prince dresses like a prince, eats like a human being, and occupies the place assigned to him. Beneath the table lies another world: the world of disorientation, *dimyon*, fragmentation, and the collapse of the stable distinctions upon which ordinary life depends.

The movement beneath the table is therefore not merely a descent into pathology. It represents the moment in which the previous form of consciousness becomes impossible to maintain and a person is forced into confrontation with everything that the ordered world had previously concealed. The central question of the story is whether one who has discovered this lower world can ever return to the table without denying what he discovered beneath it.

This is the Torah of the *tzaddikim* who know how to speak beneath the table. It is the Torah that becomes necessary in the loss of identity, in the breakdown of self, in the post-traumatic space where language itself begins to fail and the person folds inward in an attempt to recover some ground of meaning. It addresses the desperate human search for certainty within the free fall of doubt and

subjective experience, and it reveals the light of the tzaddik who does not remain safely above but descends into that lower space. Most importantly, it teaches a form of healing that does not demand immediate transformation. There are deficiencies that must eventually be repaired, behaviors that must change, and patterns that cannot remain as they are; nevertheless, the path toward their rectification may begin with learning how to remain present to what is, rather than making health conditional upon becoming someone else.

The Descent of the Prince

פעם אחת נפל בן מלך אחד לשגעון, שהוא תרנגול הודו
הנקרא הינדיק.

*Once, a prince fell into madness,
believing that he was a turkey, called a Hindik.*

Rebbe Nachman begins with a prince who falls into madness and comes to understand himself as a Hindik, a turkey. The anonymity of the story is essential. This is not the biography of a particular prince but a structure of experience that belongs, in one form or another, to every person. The ben melech is the soul in its essential dignity, the child of the King, yet that essential identity does not prevent the possibility of a profound collapse in the way that identity is experienced. The prince remains objectively a prince even as he becomes incapable of experiencing himself as one. His shiga'on therefore opens the distance between essential self and consciousness, between what a person is in his deepest root and what he is presently capable of knowing himself to be.

There is already a significant *remez* in Rebbe Nachman's use of *hodu* for the turkey. *הודו* has the numerical value of twenty-one, corresponding to the Divine Name *אהיה*, the Name associated with *teshuvah* and becoming: *ana zamin lemehevei*, "I am prepared to be." The hidden possibility within the *Hindik* is therefore not necessarily the immediate recovery of a fixed identity, but the capacity to become. The person who has lost the certainty of "I am" may still retain the possibility of "I will be." This becomes crucial to the entire process of healing, because the *chacham* who heals will never demand that the prince resolve the question of his identity before he begins to move. The story instead reveals a slower process in which action, relationship, *levush*, and habituation gradually create the vessels within which a renewed identity can emerge.

There is another *remez* in the word *Hindik* itself, which can be heard as *נה"י דק*: the lower dimensions of *Netzach*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*, but in their most delicate and subtle form. The Turkey Prince occupies precisely this lower register of the human being, the place in which the grandeur of identity has contracted into the smallness and instability of embodied experience. Yet the *dakut*, the subtlety within that lower place, already suggests that what appears merely

animalistic or regressive may conceal something finer. The story will not redeem the prince by bypassing these lower dimensions. It will reveal how they themselves can be incorporated into a fuller human life.

וצריך הוא לישב ערום תחת השולחן, ולגרור חתיכות לחם
ועצמות כמו הינדיק.

*And he felt compelled to sit naked beneath the table
and drag pieces of bread and bones about, like a
turkey.*

The word וצריך deserves attention. The prince does not merely decide that he would prefer to sit beneath the table; from within his altered consciousness, he experiences this descent as a necessity. He needs to sit naked beneath the table. The nakedness expresses the stripping away of levushim, the external garments through which identity is mediated and made socially intelligible. Above the table he possesses a name, a role, a lineage, and an expected form of conduct. Beneath the table those garments have become intolerable, and the prince seeks an existence prior to them, an unmediated encounter with himself that no longer depends upon the identities imposed from outside. Yet

what he discovers in this nakedness is not immediately an essential wholeness. He discovers fragmentation. He drags after himself חתיכות, severed pieces of bread, together with bones. His experience beneath the table is an experience of pieces that no longer disclose the whole from which they came.

The Failure of Help

וכל הרופאים נואשו מלעזור לו ולרפאותו מזה, והיה המלך
בצער גדול מזה.

*All the doctors despaired of helping him and curing
him of this, and the king was greatly distressed.*

The doctors eventually despair of both helping and healing the prince. Their failure is not simply a lack of technique; it reflects the structure of the relationship from which they approach him. The doctor remains above the table and understands himself as possessing the health that the prince lacks. His task is consequently to convince the prince to abandon the false world below and return to the reality recognized by everyone above. Yet the very distinction between the healthy doctor and the sick prince makes genuine encounter impossible. Every attempt to “help” already communicates that the prince’s present experience is a place from which he must be extracted before anything meaningful can occur.

Their despair is equally revealing. They inhabit a therapeutic world in which hopelessness remains possible because healing has been defined in advance as a particular

outcome. When that outcome cannot be imposed, hope collapses. The true healer must therefore know the secret expressed elsewhere by Rebbe Nachman as אין שום יאוש בעולם כלל. This does not mean that every condition will immediately disappear or that every desired outcome can be guaranteed. It means that there is no human place, including the place beneath the table, that is inherently excluded from becoming a site of Divine encounter and movement. The healer who knows this can remain present even when the expected path forward has disappeared.

This makes Rebbe Nachman's later change of language especially significant. The doctors despair מלעזור לו, "of helping him and healing him," whereas the chacham who arrives says only אני מקבל על עצמי לרפאותו, "I take it upon myself to heal him." The language of la'azor, helping, disappears. Help can imply an asymmetry in which I remain where I am and extend myself toward you in order to bring you toward my position. The chacham will pursue a different kind of refuah. He will not attempt to heal the prince from the secure position of someone who has never been beneath the table. His first act will be to surrender that position entirely and descend into the prince's world.

The Wisdom of Echad

עד שבא חכם אחד ואמר: אני מקבל על עצמי לרפאותו.

Until a certain wise man came and said: "I take it upon myself to heal him."

Rebbe Nachman describes him as a חכם אחד, and the word echad opens the inner logic of his wisdom. He is wise because he perceives unity where the other doctors perceive mutually exclusive states. They see sanity and madness, prince and turkey, table and beneath the table, health and sickness. The chacham echad perceives that these oppositions can be held within a deeper unity. He understands something of the relationship between yichuda ila'ah and yichuda tata'ah, between the Divine unity revealed in the higher and ordered dimensions of experience and the unity that remains concealed within the lower worlds of fragmentation. He therefore does not fear the descent beneath the table, because he does not experience that space as outside the possibility of Echad.

His declaration, *אני מקבל על עצמי לרפאותו*, is equally significant. Before he offers an explanation, he accepts responsibility. There is a particular koach that becomes available through genuine kabbalat achrayut. This is part of the inner meaning of mazal tov as explained by Rav Shlomo Fisher: a new responsibility demands a new strength, and therefore a new makif, a surrounding light, must become available to the person who has accepted it. It is likewise related to the force of a shevuah, to *משביעין אותו תהי צדיק*, and *ואל תהי רשע*, in which a person draws upon a strength beyond his present measurable capacity. One does not necessarily know in advance how the process will unfold, yet the willingness to accept responsibility prevents uncertainty from becoming hopelessness. The other doctors arrive at despair because their conception of healing requires visible progress toward a predetermined image of health. The chacham can remain even when the path is unclear because his commitment is not dependent upon already knowing the route by which the prince will return.

והלך והפשיט גם כן את עצמו ערום, וישב תחת השולחן
אצל בן המלך הנ"ל, וגם כן גרר פירורים ועצמות.

*He went and likewise undressed himself, sat naked
beneath the table beside the aforementioned prince,
and also dragged crumbs and bones about.*

Only now does the true method of the chacham become visible. He removes his own clothing and sits beneath the table אצל בן המלך, beside the prince. He does not begin by speaking. He does not insist upon an interpretation of what has happened, nor does he immediately introduce the possibility of change. He first removes the levushim that establish him as the one who knows and descends toward the etzem, the shared human ground beneath the external distinctions between healer and patient, teacher and student, tzaddik and broken person. The word אצל is especially precise: he sits near him, in proximity to him. He does not position himself opposite the prince in a posture of confrontation. His first intervention is presence.

This is one of the story's deepest principles of education and healing. There are moments when proximity accomplishes what explanation cannot. The person beneath

the table has already experienced the language of those standing above him as a demand that he become someone else. The chacham therefore communicates something prior to language: there is no place in your experience into which I am unwilling to enter. Only after this relationship has been established will the possibility of movement appear. The tzaddik can descend into the world of the talmid precisely because he does not confuse descent with abandonment of truth. He carries the table with him even while sitting beneath it.

From פירורים to חתיכות, Fragments to Fractals

There is a remarkable change in Rebbe Nachman's language at this point. When the prince initially gathers food beneath the table, he gathers חתיכות. When the chacham joins him, Rebbe Nachman describes the same basic activity as gathering פירורים. A chatichah is defined by being cut away from a whole; it carries the consciousness of chatach, severance. The prince experiences his life as disconnected pieces whose relationship to the whole has been lost. Beneath the table no longer seems connected to the table, just as his present self no longer seems connected to the prince he once was or the prince everyone insists he remains.

The tzaddik, however, encounters pirurim. The pieces remain small and scattered, but the meaning of their smallness has changed. There is a hidden resonance between pirurim and Purim, the world in which concealment itself becomes the vessel through which a deeper revelation emerges. There is also something of the secret of shirayim: the smallest remainder received from the tzaddik can contain a relationship to the whole far beyond

its apparent dimensions. A single good thought, a moment of genuine feeling, one act of goodness, one movement toward HaKadosh Baruch Hu can become enough to sustain a person because the fragment is no longer experienced merely as evidence of what is absent.

The movement from chatichot to pirurim is therefore a movement from fragment to fractal. The tzaddik does not necessarily change the material of the person's experience; he reveals that the whole can be discovered within the smallest part. This is one of the deepest movements of penimiyut haTorah: to take what appears severed and reveal that its apparent isolation does not exhaust its meaning. The person beneath the table sees fragments because the unity has disappeared from view. The chacham echad sees those same fragments from within the consciousness of Echad, and therefore perceives how the whole remains mysteriously present within every piece.

The atzamot deepen the same idea. עצמות points toward עצם, essence. The chacham does not remain preoccupied with the external differences between himself and the prince but continues descending until he reaches the level at which their experience is shared.

On the level of levushim, they are opposites: wise and mad, healer and patient, table and underneath the table. At the level of etzem, the distance is no longer absolute. This is why the tzaddik can enter the broken experience of another without patronizing him. He is not manufacturing identification as a technique. He has discovered something of the same etzem within himself.

מי and מה: The Crisis of Authenticity

ושאלו בן המלך: מי אתה, ומה אתה עושה פה?

The prince asked him: “Who are you, and what are you doing here?”

Only after the chacham has entered his world does the prince initiate the conversation. He notices that someone else now occupies the space beneath the table without interrogating him, correcting him, or demanding that he leave it, and he asks two questions: מי אתה — who are you? ומה אתה עושה פה — what are you doing here? These are not incidental questions. Mi and mah, who and what, represent the two fundamental orientations of the person searching for a way back into life: Who am I, and what am I meant to do?

The Turkey Prince assumes that the first question must be resolved before the second can meaningfully be addressed. If I do not know who I am, if I cannot identify the authenticity at the center of my existence, then how can I know what to do? This is part of what drove him beneath

the table in the first place. The world above seemed to demand actions whose inner truth he could no longer verify. To continue sitting there would therefore have felt like performance, and performance felt intolerable. Better to be naked beneath the table than clothed in an identity one no longer experiences as real.

The chacham responds with an extraordinary omission. He does not answer the question of *mi*. Instead he returns the second question to the prince:

ומה אתה עושה פה?

“And what are you doing here?”

The omission is the teaching. The prince believes that one must first possess certainty about identity and only afterward enter the world of action. The tzaddik introduces the secret of *נעשה ונשמע*: one does not always need to know in order to do. If a person waits until every action emerges from complete authenticity, absolute clarity, and perfectly purified motivation, he may remain beneath the table indefinitely. The chacham therefore does not solve the question of *mi* before allowing the question of *mah* to become meaningful. He creates the possibility that action itself may participate in the eventual clarification of identity.

אמר לו: אני הינדיק. אמר לו: אני גם כן הינדיק

He told him: "I am a turkey." He replied: "I, too, am a turkey."

The prince answers with complete simplicity: "I am a Hindik." This is why he is beneath the table; in his consciousness, identity dictates location and behavior. A turkey belongs below. The chacham responds with the sentence upon which the entire story turns: אני גם כן הינדיק — I am also a turkey.

This is far more radical than saying, "I understand why you feel like a turkey." Nor does Rebbe Nachman describe the chacham as pretending to be one for therapeutic purposes. The chacham reveals something true about himself. He too knows the instability of human knowledge. He too understands the inadequacy of human consciousness before the Infinite. He too knows that much of what appears to us as certainty is sustained through dimyon, that human beings inevitably inhabit a world of ke'ilu, of "as if."

The prince had discovered the inauthenticity within ordinary religious and human performance and concluded that he could no longer participate in it. The tzaddik tells him that he has seen the same thing and has not needed to flee from life because of it.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu, in relation to the Shechinah, remains *kekof bifnei haShechinah*, as an ape before the Divine Presence. The highest human attainment does not erase the irreducible distance between finite consciousness and the Infinite. The attainment of *Sha'ar HaNun* itself contains the recognition of what cannot be attained. The tzaddik therefore knows that he too is working with imagination, approximation, and *ke'ilui*. Yet he has discovered that this does not invalidate *avodat Hashem*. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* desires precisely the service of finite human beings, the *ma'aseh miBitachon* of those who go into battle carrying wooden swords because those are the swords they have been given. The response to the discovery that our service is incomplete is not to abandon the table. It is to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* from within the incompleteness itself.

The Patience of the Tzaddik

וישבו שניהם יחד כך איזה זמן, עד שנעשו רגילים זה עם זה.

*The two of them sat together like this for some time,
until they grew accustomed to one another.*

Rebbe Nachman now inserts something that cannot be reduced to a technique: time. They sit together *איזה זמן*, for some period, until they become accustomed to one another. The chacham has already identified with the prince and could theoretically begin teaching him immediately, yet he does not. Relationship must precede intervention. The prince must first discover that the chacham's presence beneath the table is not merely a disguised strategy for dragging him out.

The words *עד שנעשו רגילים זה עם זה* indicate that healing requires *regilut*, the slow formation of familiarity. This is true in education, therapy, spiritual growth, and our relationship with ourselves. There are experiences that cannot be forced into transformation without repeating the original violence of demanding that the person become something he is not yet capable of being. The tzaddik possesses enough faith in the destination to refrain from

rushing the journey. He can remain beneath the table without panic because he knows that remaining present to a condition is not the same as surrendering to it.

This also clarifies the depth of *אני גם כן הינדיק*. The chacham does not merely imitate the prince long enough to establish rapport. Rebbe Nachman never tells us that he later reveals, “I was only pretending.” The tzaddik is genuinely revealing the turkey dimension within himself, the place of not-knowing and dimyon that remains even within wisdom. The relationship becomes possible because the prince eventually recognizes that the person sitting beside him is not secretly mocking his reality from the superior position of the table.

The Birth of the Wise Turkey

אז רמז החכם לבני הבית להשליך להם כותנות.

Then the wise man signaled to the members of the household to throw them shirts.

Only after familiarity has developed does the chacham hint to the household that shirts should be thrown beneath the table. Even here he does not command loudly. He is meramez. די לחכימא ברמיזא: for the wise, a hint is sufficient. The method itself remains delicate because the entire process concerns the delicateness of the human being, the subtle place in which too much force can destroy precisely what one hopes to repair.

At this point Rebbe Nachman introduces an extraordinary expression: החכם ההינדיק, the wise turkey. The synthesis that the prince believed impossible is now standing before him. The prince had assumed that wisdom and turkey-consciousness were mutually exclusive; if he were truly a Hindik, he could no longer inhabit the world of the chacham. Yet the person guiding him is simultaneously both. There is the dimension connected above and the dimension connected below, sechel and dimyon, yetzer tov

and yetzer hara. The goal is not to annihilate one half of the human being but to draw both into the service of HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Indeed, the chacham is a Hindik precisely because he is a genuine chacham. The deeper a person enters avodat Hashem, the more he recognizes that every attainment is only another beginning. Every ceiling becomes the floor of the next level. The true spiritual posture therefore remains כְּאִילוּ לֹא הִתְחַלֵּיתִי, as though I have not yet begun. Wisdom that loses awareness of its own limitation becomes incapable of descending beneath the table. The chacham ha-Hindik can guide the prince because his wisdom contains within itself the knowledge that he too remains a beginner before the Infinite.

The First Garment

ואמר החכם ההינדיק לבן המלך: אתה חושב שהינדיק אינו יכול לילך עם כותנות? יכולים להיות בלבוש כותנות ואף על פי כן יהיה הינדיק.

The wise turkey said to the prince: “Do you think a turkey cannot wear shirts? One can wear shirts and still be a turkey.”

The genius of the intervention lies in what the chacham refuses to challenge. He never tells the prince, “You are not a turkey.” Instead he questions the conclusions the prince has drawn from being one. Who said that a turkey cannot wear a shirt? The prince’s identity is left intact while the behavioral prison built around that identity begins to loosen.

This distinction is foundational. The person often assumes that his present inner condition dictates the full range of what is possible: because I feel this way, I must behave this way; because I cannot presently experience myself differently, another form of life would be dishonest. The tzaddik does not demand a new identity as the prerequisite

for new behavior. He creates space between identity and action. You can remain exactly where you presently understand yourself to be and nevertheless take on a levush.

A levush is not simply a covering that conceals the truth. In penimiyut haTorah, clothing conceals precisely in order to reveal. An interior light too intense to appear directly requires an external vessel through which it can become accessible. Halbashah is therefore the process by which a deeper level enters a more external one without ceasing to be itself. The prince had stripped himself because he experienced garments as falsifications. The chacham teaches him that the external form need not betray the interior. It may be the only way the interior can eventually find expression.

This has enormous implications for avodat Hashem. A person may not yet feel what he believes he ought to feel. He may experience himself as uncertain, conflicted, or profoundly inauthentic. The response need not be to wait until the inner world becomes pure before acting. One can put on the garment. One can pray, learn, perform the mitzvah, speak gently, live according to a form that the heart has not yet fully inhabited. The garment is not necessarily hypocritical. Properly understood, it can become the vessel into which the heart will eventually grow.

כי במקום אחר ראיתי הינדיקים לבושים כותנות.

“For elsewhere I have seen turkeys wearing shirts.”

The chacham adds that he has seen turkeys elsewhere who wore clothing. This is another essential element of his method. He does not ground the prince's hope solely in his own opinion. He places it at the feet of the tzaddikim who came before him. He has seen this possibility embodied in Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah; in Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid HaMelech; in the entire history of human beings whose spiritual greatness did not require the elimination of their humanity. Adam HaRishon himself contains the mystery of Adam, the being whose greatness emerges through the complex meeting of Divine soul, embodied existence, and the faculty of dimyon. The chacham can therefore say that this synthesis is not a psychological invention. It belongs to the inherited reality of avodat Hashem.

From the Heart to Habit

ולבשו שניהם הכותנות. ואחר איזה זמן רמז והשליכו להם
גם כן מכנסיים.

*They both put on the shirts. After some time, he
signaled, and they also threw them trousers.*

The progression of garments is itself meaningful. First comes the shirt, which clothes the upper body and the region of the heart; afterward come the pants, associated with the lower dimensions of the person, with the legs and the more habituated structures of action. The sequence suggests that transformation must begin by creating a vessel around emotional experience before it can fully reorganize behavior. First the person is helped to perceive that another way of living is possible and that his emotional world can be held rather than destroyed. Only afterward can the change descend into Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, into the repetitive patterns through which life is actually lived.

This is why the process occurs gradually. The prince is not overwhelmed with a complete human wardrobe all at once. The chacham repeats the same essential teaching in successive forms: you may take on this garment and remain

a Hindik. Each new step threatens the prince with the fear that he is betraying the truth he discovered beneath the table, and each time the chacham shows him that integration does not require betrayal. His individuality, imagination, questioning, and awareness of the instability beneath conventional forms do not have to disappear in order for him to function within those forms.

וכן עם שאר הבגדים.

And likewise with the other garments.

Rebbe Nachman compresses the continuation into a simple repetition: “and so with the other garments.” There is an entire educational principle contained here. Healing often advances through repeated encounters with essentially the same truth. Repetition can become lifeless when it merely reproduces what has already occurred, but it becomes transformative when each repetition enters a new layer of the person. The tzaddikim give us words of emunah, practices, eitzot, and ways of seeing that must be traveled again and again until they create passageways from the mind into the heart and from the heart into habit. The novelty is not always in hearing something new; sometimes it lies in discovering that an old truth can now enter a place within us that was previously unable to receive it.

When the Healing Moves Inside

ואחר כך רמז והשליכו להם מאכלי אדם מהשולחן.

Afterward, he signaled, and they threw them human food from the table.

Only after the garments have been accepted does the chacham introduce human food. The distinction is crucial. Clothing remains external to the person; food is taken inward, digested, and transformed into the substance of the body itself. The movement from clothing to food is therefore the movement from levushim toward penimiyut. At first the prince learns that he can behave in ways that do not perfectly correspond to his present internal state. Now he is taught that even the internal state is not as fixed as he imagined.

This is the secret of dimyon in its elevated form. A person can awaken an emotional experience that he does not yet possess naturally. This is one of the great themes of the Tanya's Sefer Shel Beinonim: the inner world need not be treated as a static given whose present contents determine the limits of spiritual possibility. Through contemplation, imagination, speech, and action, one can awaken feelings

that initially seem constructed or incomplete, and those very movements can uncover something authentic that had been inaccessible. The “pretending” is not necessarily opposed to the real. At times it is the passageway by which the real becomes available. This is a deeper understanding of מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה. The lishmah does not simply arrive after the lo lishmah has been discarded. It can emerge mitoch, from within the midst of it. The inauthentic act may contain within itself a concealed point of authenticity that becomes visible only through repetition and engagement. The prince had fled beneath the table because he believed that anything short of complete authenticity was false. The chacham reveals that the demand for absolute authenticity can itself prevent a person from discovering the authenticity hidden within his imperfect actions.

אתה חושב שאם אוכלים מאכלים טובים, איז מען שוין קיין
הינדיק נישט? מען קען עסן און דאך זיין א הינדיק.

*“Do you think that if one eats good food, one is no
longer a turkey? One can eat and still be a turkey.”*

Again the chacham does not attack the identity. He loosens the restriction. You believe that eating human food would mean you are no longer a turkey, but who established that rule? One can eat and nevertheless remain a Hindik. The prince can begin to internalize something from the table without surrendering what he discovered beneath it. His inner world can expand without requiring him to repudiate the experience through which he arrived there.

Returning Without Going Backward

ואחר כך אמר לו: אתה חושב שהינדיק מוכרח להיות דווקא
תחת השולחן?

*Afterward he said to him: "Do you think a turkey
must necessarily be specifically beneath the table?"*

The entire story now arrives at the question for which every previous intervention has prepared the prince. Does a Hindik have to remain specifically beneath the table? The crucial word is מוכרח. The chacham has spent the entire process dismantling the network of imagined necessities that surrounded the prince's identity. If I am a turkey, I must be naked. If I am a turkey, I cannot wear human clothes. If I am a turkey, I cannot eat human food. One by one, each supposed necessity has been revealed as an assumption rather than an absolute truth. Now the same question can finally be asked about place itself. The tzaddik does not deny that the prince may have needed the descent. There are experiences that can only be discovered beneath the table. A person may need to leave the inherited form in order to recognize what had become unconscious within it;

he may need to encounter doubt, fragmentation, dimyon, individuality, and the collapse of previous certainties. The worlds of separation, the lower worlds of Beri'ah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, are real dimensions of human experience, and their truths cannot simply be erased by insisting upon the perspective of Atzilut. Yet a descent that was necessary need not become a permanent address.

This is where the chacham reveals the possibility of return without regression. The prince had assumed that returning to the table would mean becoming the old prince again, surrendering everything he had discovered beneath it. The tzaddik shows him that the light discovered below can be carried upward. The potency of the baal teshuvah can enter the acts associated with the tzaddik. One does not have to remain in visible collapse in order to retain the depth discovered through collapse. Indeed, for the person living at a sufficiently refined level, even the smallest deviation from his proper alignment can contain the existential depth of a descent. One need not perpetually recreate catastrophe in order to retain access to the truths catastrophe once revealed.

יכולים להיות הינדיק ולהיות אצל השולחן.

“One can be a turkey and be beside the table.”

A person can remain a Hindik and nevertheless be beside the table. This is the sentence toward which the entire tale has been moving. The doctors wanted the turkey to disappear so that the prince could return. The chacham discovers a higher possibility: the turkey itself can return to the table. Nothing essential that was discovered beneath it must be denied. The questioning can come back. The dimyon can come back. The knowledge of human limitation and inauthenticity can come back. The person does not need to recover the innocence he possessed before his fall. He can return with the consciousness acquired through the fall and allow it to deepen the life he once inhabited only externally. This is why the healed person is not simply the original prince restored to his previous condition. He has become something that did not exist before the descent: a Turkey Prince. The family wanted a prince who no longer knew himself as a turkey. The chacham reveals a prince capable of containing both identities without being destroyed by their apparent contradiction. This is lishmah that has passed through lo lishmah, wisdom that has encountered dimyon, and the ordered life of the table enriched by the Torah discovered beneath it.

The Meaning of Complete Healing

וכן התנהג עמו עד שריפא אותו לגמרי.

And he continued dealing with him in this way until he healed him completely.

Rebbe Nachman says that the chacham continued in this manner until he healed the prince completely. Yet the story never records the prince announcing that he had been mistaken and was not really a turkey. This absence is essential. Complete healing does not consist in annihilating the consciousness around which the crisis had formed. It consists in removing its tyranny. The prince can now wear clothing, eat human food, and occupy a human place while still containing within himself the Hindik. His inner complexity no longer prevents him from functioning. The imagination has been drawn into vessels; fragmentation has been reconnected to the whole; what previously required exile beneath the table can now exist within a broader and more integrated life.

This returns us to the original distinction between the doctors and the chacham. The doctors attempted לעזור לו, to help and to heal. Their help assumed that they occupied one position and the prince another. The chacham says only אני מקבל על עצמי לרפאותו. He does not need to “help” from outside because his healing proceeds through participation, identification, and a transformation in the way the condition itself is seen. There are certainly behaviors that must eventually be relinquished and patterns of thought that must be undone, but these changes are not accomplished through contempt for the place from which they arose. The tzaddik is mezakech the condition, refining it until the point of holiness concealed within it can become visible. This suggests a deeper meaning of refuah. Healing is not merely the removal of a symptom; it is a transformation of vision. לא רפא נא לה becomes the plea to see the condition within a larger light, to discover a possibility within it that was invisible while one remained trapped in its original framing. The same turkey, the same table, the same fragments, and even the same awareness of human incompleteness can become components of health when they are held within a different consciousness.

Wisdom That Can Enter Foolishness

וזה בחינת מה שאמרו רז"ל על הפסוק הנאמר בשלמה: "ויחכם
מכל האדם" — אפילו מן השוטים. והנמשל מובן למבינים.

*This corresponds to what our Sages said concerning the
verse about Solomon, "He was wiser than all men"—even
than fools. And the parable's meaning is understood by
those who understand.*

Rebbe Nachman concludes by turning to Shlomo HaMelech, whose wisdom was described by Chazal as extending even beyond that of the shotim, those who inhabit the world of foolishness or madness. Ordinary chochmah knows how to remain wise. The higher wisdom represented by Shlomo knows how to enter the world that appears to contradict wisdom and discover the hidden intelligence within it. This is the secret of the ben David and ultimately of Mashiach, the badchana demalka, the King's jester, whose wisdom is sufficiently expansive to include sechok, paradox, darkness, imagination, and the apparent inversion of ordinary order.

The movement is therefore not simply from foolishness toward wisdom. It begins with wisdom at the table, descends into the folly beneath the table, and then returns to the table carrying something that could never have been acquired by remaining above. The resulting wisdom is greater precisely because it has passed through what seemed to negate it. Authenticity descends into the experience of inauthenticity and emerges with a deeper understanding of what authenticity can mean. Chochmah encounters dimyon and discovers that imagination need not be wisdom's enemy. The prince encounters the turkey and discovers that the turkey need not destroy the prince. Rebbe Nachman therefore ends with והנמשל מובן למבינים, "the meaning is understood by those who understand." The formulation itself points toward Binah. This entire sugya belongs to the world of Binah, to מבין דבר מתוך דבר, the capacity to understand one thing from within another. Chochmah in its pristine form belongs to the table, to the ordered world of Atzilut in which everything occupies its proper place. Binah possesses the capacity to descend into the worlds of separation, into Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and to discover how the Divine light remains present there as well. The chacham ha-Hindik does precisely this: he understands the table from within beneath the table,

wisdom from within foolishness, lishmah from within lo lishmah, and unity from within fragmentation.

The descent is therefore not outside the process of revelation. It becomes part of the process through which a more encompassing revelation can emerge. The worlds of separation are not validated as final states; they are refined and elevated until their hidden relationship to Atzilut becomes visible. The chacham descends into BiY”A not in order to remain there but in order to reveal that even there the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu has never entirely disappeared. He can then elevate that lower consciousness toward a unity it could never have reached by simply denying its own existence.

Slowly Slowly, Little by Little

The tradition appended to the story draws out its practical meaning:

שאדם רוצה להתקרב לעבודת השם, הלא הוא הינדיק מלובש בחומריות וכו', ובדרך זה יכולים מעט מעט לקרב את עצמו לעבודת השם עד שנכנסים לגמרי. וכן בהתקרבות אנשים על דרך זה, ודי למבין.

When a person wishes to draw close to the service of Hashem, he is, after all, a turkey, clothed in materiality. In this way, one can gradually draw oneself closer to the service of Hashem until one enters fully; and the same approach applies to bringing other people close. This is sufficient for one who understands.

A person who wishes to draw near to avodat Hashem is, after all, a Hindik, clothed in materiality. Through this path one can לאט לאט, slowly and gradually, bring oneself closer to the service of Hashem until one enters completely. The same method applies to bringing others close. The story is therefore not merely an account of how a tzaddik heals another person; it describes how a person must learn to

relate to himself. The inner Hindik cannot be beaten into submission without damaging the person who contains it. One must learn the patient work of integration, drawing one garment after another over the places that remain chaotic until those places themselves become capable of participating in avodat Hashem.

The phrase לאט לאט resonates deeply with the language of the Arizal. When the Kav Or Ein Sof enters the chalal created through tzimtzum, the light descends gradually, le'at le'at. The void cannot receive the Infinite all at once. The light must enter according to the capacity of the vessels. Likewise, in the process of birur, the shattered vessels that have fallen into the lower worlds are clarified and elevated מעט מעט, little by little. The two movements belong together: לאט לאט and מעט מעט, slowly by slowly and little by little. The pace and the quantity are both measured according to what the broken vessel is presently capable of containing.

There is an additional remez in לֹאֵט, whose numerical value is forty-nine. The sick person, the choleh, is likewise associated in the writings of the Arizal with forty-nine, lacking the fiftieth gate. The movement toward Sha'ar HaNun therefore does not occur by leaping over the forty-nine levels that presently constitute the person's reality. One travels through them le'at le'at. The very slowness of the process is what makes the fiftieth gate accessible. Refuah does not come through overwhelming the person with a light he cannot yet contain, but through expanding the vessel until what once stood outside its capacity can gradually become internal.

The structure of Rebbe Nachman's story perfectly embodies this Kabbalistic movement. The chacham does not drag the prince from beneath the table. He sits with him. After time, a shirt appears. After more time, pants. Then the other garments. Only afterward does food enter, and only after the external vessels have been established and the internal nourishment has begun does the question of leaving the space beneath the table become possible. The slowness is not a concession to weakness; it is the architecture of tikkun.

Light that enters a shattered vessel without regard for the vessel's capacity can simply shatter it again. The wisdom of the tzaddik lies in knowing how much light can enter now.

Seen this way, the Turkey Prince becomes a miniature account of creation itself. There is an original order, followed by tzimtzum, an empty space, fragmentation, and the apparent loss of unity. Then the light reenters the void, but it does not erase the void. It enters gradually, allowing vessels to form and broken pieces to be clarified. The tzaddik reenacts this cosmic process beneath an ordinary table. He enters another human being's *chalal*, remains there without flooding it, gathers the fragments with him, reaches toward the *etzem*, and slowly introduces forms capable of containing a greater light.

The Torah That Exists Beneath the Table

This is ultimately the Torah of the tzaddikim: there is Torah at the table, and there is also Torah beneath the table. There is a Torah for the person who possesses clarity and a Torah for the person whose previous language of identity has collapsed. There is a Torah of chochmah and a Torah that knows how to enter dimyon; a Torah of lishmah and a Torah that can locate the concealed lishmah within lo lishmah. The error is to imagine that HaKadosh Baruch Hu can be found only in the first member of each pair.

The **אחד** **הכל** knows the secret of Echad. He knows that the One revealed in the ordered world above the table is not absent from the fractured world beneath it. This does not mean that above and below are identical or that brokenness should be romanticized. The entire story moves toward transformation. But transformation becomes possible precisely because the lower place is first recognized as belonging within the Divine unity rather than existing outside it. If HaKadosh Baruch Hu can only be found once I have become healthy, certain, authentic, and spiritually

ordered, then all of the places in which I am not yet those things become spiritually abandoned territory. The tzaddik refuses that abandonment.

This is why the chacham can tell the prince that he does not need to stop being a turkey before beginning to live. A person can spend years waiting for the moment in which his doubts disappear, his motivations become pure, his emotional world settles, and his religious life finally feels authentic. Only then, he imagines, will he pray properly, learn properly, love properly, and take his place at the table. Rebbe Nachman reverses the order. The person begins while still experiencing himself as a Hindik. He takes on the levush, receives the nourishment, and participates in the life of the table before every question of identity has been resolved. In time, these acts cease to feel like external impositions and become vessels through which something deeper within him can emerge.

The king and the doctors wanted the original prince returned to them. The chacham produces something more complex and therefore more whole. The prince who returns has been beneath the table. He knows fragmentation, dimyon, uncertainty, and the inability to sustain the fantasy of complete human authenticity. He knows that the

garments are garments and nevertheless understands their necessity. He knows that human beings stand before the Infinite with inadequate understanding and nevertheless chooses avodat Hashem. He has discovered the ke'ilu at the heart of human existence without allowing that discovery to collapse into nihilism. The prince who returns is therefore not the prince who left. He is the **החכם ההינדיק**, the wise turkey, in whom what once appeared contradictory can now coexist. He can contain sechel and dimyon, yetzer tov and yetzer hara, lishmah and the ongoing struggle of lo lishmah, the dignity of the prince and the humility of the turkey. This is the fuller meaning of serving HaKadosh Baruch Hu **בכל לבבך**, with both inclinations and with the entirety of the human being. The goal is not to become angelic by amputating everything that makes us human. It is to draw the whole human being into avodah.

Perhaps this is also the secret of hodu. The same word that names the turkey gestures toward hoda'ah: gratitude, acknowledgment, surrender. The human being can offer something the angel cannot precisely because he inhabits the distance between what he is and what he is becoming. He can discover grace in the fact that another moment has been given to him in which to become. **אֶהְיֶה** — I will be. **אֲנִי זָמִין לְמַהְרִי** — I am prepared to become. The uncertainty

of identity that originally drove the prince beneath the table can itself be transformed into the openness through which growth remains possible. The refuah of the Turkey Prince therefore does not culminate in the discovery that he was never beneath the table or that the entire episode was merely a mistake. It culminates in the discovery that nothing he encountered beneath the table possessed the power to sever him from his essential identity as a ben melech. The tzaddik does not teach him to deny the turkey but to discover that the turkey was never the opposite of the prince in the absolute way he had imagined. Once that opposition collapses, the prince no longer needs to choose between authenticity and participation, between his inner experience and the ordered forms of life.

He can return to the table carrying the Torah he discovered beneath it. The fragments can become pirurim, the bones can disclose etzem, imagination can become a vessel for emunah, and lo lishmah can disclose the point of lishmah hidden within it. The healing proceeds לאט לאט, because the vessel must be respected, and מעט מעט, because each fragment must be gathered without violence. What emerges is not a return to the simplicity that preceded the fall, but a

deeper unity that could only become visible after the apparent unity had broken apart.

This is the secret of learning how to sit at the table again. The person does not wait until every element of his inner life has been resolved. He learns instead how to allow the unresolved parts themselves to enter the vessels of life and avodat Hashem. He learns that ke'ilu need not be the enemy of emunah, that the wooden sword can still be raised in service of the King, and that the human struggle to become is itself precious before HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The tzaddik who descended beneath the table has revealed that the lower place was never outside the domain of Echad.

And perhaps this is why the deepest healing does not restore the prince to who he was before. It reveals something that could not have been known before the descent: that the prince remains a prince even while experiencing himself as a turkey, and that precisely when this no longer needs to be denied, the turkey can finally rise from beneath the table. He does not leave himself behind when he rises. He brings the whole story with him, and for the first time the table is capable of containing the entirety of who he has become.



*Explore more at Reb Joey's website,
InwardTorah.org*

Reb Joey's InwardTorah platform is dedicated to making the depth, beauty, and healing wisdom of penimiyut haTorah accessible to all who seek it.

To explore more teachings from R' Joey Rosenfeld, listen to shiurim, discover additional essays and resources, or help support the creation and sharing of Torah publications like this one, visit:

inwardtorah.org