

“In the Wilderness”

From Rabbi Perets Auerbach’s “The Science, Art and Heart of Hitbodedut.” This work-in-progress may be purchased by contacting the author by email: peretsz@gmail.com. We thank Rabbi Auerbach for permitting us to present excerpts from his writings here. Footnotes have been omitted for this online version.

“*Bamidbar*” (“in the wilderness”) is the name of an entire book of the *Chumash* (Pentateuch). The Torah was given specifically in a wilderness, away from civilization. Fields, forests, and mountains share this quality, but each one has its special nuance that makes the practice of *hitbodedut* in it have a unique taste.

“For Dovid, in the wilderness of Yehudah” (Psalms 63:1). “If only I had wings, I would distance... I would stay over in the wilderness, *selah*” (ibid. 55:8). Dovid HaMelech wandered through the wilderness expressing his longing for God in *hitbodedut*. What is its special quality?

The city at night is empty after a day of the masses pursuing materialism. Their “somethingness (*yeshut*)” is embedded in the sidewalk and lingers on. Fields, valleys, and forests are full even at night with sparks, light, and souls in the grass, trees, and flowers. The unique quality of the wilderness is that it is devoid of all of this. It is accordingly the best setting in which to attain *bitul* (nullification of ego). With not even positive energetic distractions, one is left to dig within and face himself. From this to nullify ego and sprout, flower, and blossom from amidst surrounding desolation into inclusion in the *Ein Sof* (Infinite One). Dovid HaMelech appreciated this so much that he was happy to abandon his royal accommodations in order to have the special Divine communion that only the ‘unfriendly’ wilderness provides.

In Rabbi Nachman’s story, “The Lost Princess,” the Viceroy follows a side-path through forests, fields, and wildernesses in search of the Lost Princess. *Tefilah* (prayer) is a quest of searching for the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence),

which represents the *sefirah* of *Malchut* (“Kingship”). It catapults the soul to Keter (“Crown”), the ultimate source of *Malchut*.

“Triple-header.” *Keter* expresses through three heads: *RaD”LA* (“Unknowable Head”), *Atik* (“Primordial One”), and *Arich Anpin* (“Vast Countenance”). *Arich*, from which arises our deepest feeling of yearning, is called the “root of the emanated.” One connects to it through yearning – through “tree-*hitbodedut*” in the forest. *Atik*, which is the root of delight (*oneg*), is the “end of the Supernal Emanator.” One links to it through meditation in the delightful “field of holy apples” (another symbol for the *sefirah* of *Malchut*/Kingship). *RaD”LA*, which is related to *bitul*, remains aloof. One accesses it through *hitbodedut* in the wilderness—the place of complete ego-nullification.

The *seder ha-hishtalshelut* is the order of the worlds. The Divine flow is transmitted below through this order. In Rabbi Nachman’s story, the Master of Prayer would entice people to leave material pursuits and go after spirituality. He would take them out of civilization. Civilization is a metaphor for the *seder ha-hishtalshelut*. The ultimate meaning of taking them “outside of civilization” is that he would take them outside the *seder ha-hishtalshelut*. They would beat the system. “*Mesirat nefesh iz gohr andererish*—giving up one’s life is something completely different.” That is, one who puts his entire self into spiritual pursuit and gives everything for it accesses the light that surrounds all worlds. This light jumps past the order (*hishtalshelut*) and is a direct gift from God, coming without any intermediaries. It affords special closeness. It is reserved for those who are totally dedicated.