



## Ratzon, or Clarifying our Desires: Hassidut (applied Jewish mysticism) as a Spiritual Discipline

### Introduction

Want/desire – run Rotzeh – Ratz      רוצה – רץ

King David said, “Master of the Universe, each day I thought and said to myself, ‘I want to go here or there,’ but my legs would always bring me to the synagogue or the study hall.

-Leviticus Rabbah 35:1

### Source 1: Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, Lekutei Moharan 1:31:11

Now the soul comes into being primarily through the longing and yearning...for the blessed Hashem—each person commensurate with their level, that one yearns, longs and craves to reach the next level. Through these yearnings a soul is created, as is written, “My soul yearns and pines.” In other words, that which I yearn and pine for God, from this itself “my soul” is created.

This is what our Sages taught (Beitza 16a): “[but on Shabbat (the Blessed One) ceased working] vayenafash (and rested)”—as soon as The Holy One ceased working, vay avdah nefesh (woe! the soul has departed). In other words, at the onset of Shabbat, when we must receive the extra soul, we recall the departure of the soul during the week. We say, “vayenafash —woe! the soul has departed,” and we start to long for it. And by virtue of this itself that we long for the soul, from this itself the extra soul comes into being.

וְעָקַר הַתְּהוּוּת הַנְּפֹשׁ, הוּא עַל-יְדֵי הַשְּׂתוּקוּת וְהַכְּסוּפִין ... אַחַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, כֹּל אֶחָד לְפִי מְדַרְגָּתוֹ שֶׁהוּא נִכְסֵף וּמְשׁוּתָק וּמְתַגַּעְגַע לְהַגִּיעַ אֶל מְדַרְגָּה לְמַעַל מִמֶּנּוּ, עַל-יְדֵי הַכְּסוּפִין אֵלּוּ נַעֲשֶׂה נְפֹשׁ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב (תְּהִלִּים פּד): נִכְסְפָה וְגַם כָּלְתָה נְפֹשִׁי, הִינּוּ מֵה שֶׁאֲנִי נִכְסֵף וְכָלָה אַחַר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, מִזֶּה בְּעֲצָמוֹ נַעֲשֶׂה נְפֹשִׁי

וְזֶה שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנָם לְבָרְכָה (בִּיצָה טז): וַיִּנְפֹשׁ – כִּיּוֹן שֶׁשָּׁבַת, וַי אֲבָדָה נְפֹשׁ. הִינּוּ שֶׁבְתַחֲלַת הַשָּׁבַת שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְקַבֵּל נְפֹשׁ יִתְרָה, אָנוּ זוֹכְרִין מֵאֲבֹדַת הַנְּפֹשׁ בְּחַל, וְאוֹמְרִים: וַיִּנְפֹשׁ – וַי אֲבָדָה נְפֹשׁ, וּמִתְחִילִין לְהִתְגַּעְגַע אַחֲרֶיהָ. וְעַל-יְדֵי זֶה בְּעֲצָמוֹ שֶׁאֲנוּ מְתַגַּעְגַעִין אַחַר הַנְּפֹשׁ, מִזֶּה בְּעֲצָמוֹ נִתְהַוֶּה הַנְּפֹשׁ הַיִּתְרָה

**Source 2: Adrienne Maree Brown, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good***

“I believe that all organizing is science fiction - that we are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced.”

**Source 3: A psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah. (63: 2-9)**

<p>YHVH, You are my Elohim; I search for You, my soul thirsts for You, my body yearns for You, as a parched and thirsty land that has no water. I shall behold You in the sanctuary, see Your might and glory, Truly Your faithfulness is better than life; my lips declare Your praise. I bless You all my life; I lift up my hands, invoking Your name. I am sated as with a rich feast, I sing praises with joyful lips when I call You to mind upon my bed, when I think of You in the watches of the night; for You are my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I shout for joy. My soul is attached to You; Your right hand supports me.</p>	<p>נִפְשִׁי כָמָה   אֵלֵי אֱתָה אֲשַׁחֲרֶךָ צָמְאַה לֶךָ   אֱלֹהִים          לֶךָ בְּשָׂרִי בְּאַרְצֵ-צִיָּה וְעֵינַי בְּלִי-מַיִם: בֵּן בִּקְדוֹשׁ          חַזִּיתֶךָ לְרָאוֹת עֲזֹךָ וּכְבוֹדֶךָ: כִּי-טוֹב חֲסֹדֶךָ מִחַיִּים          שְׁפֹתַי יִשְׁבְּחוּנֶךָ: בֵּן אֲבָרְכֶךָ בְּחַיֵּי בְשִׁמְךָ אֲשֶׁא כִפְי:          כְּמוֹ חֶלֶב גִּדְּשׁוּ תִשְׂבַּע נִפְשִׁי וְשִׁפְתַי רִנְנוֹת: הִלְלִי-פִי:          אִם-זָכַרְתִּיךָ עַל-יְצוּעַי בְּאֲשֻׁמְרוֹת אֶהְיֶה-כֶּדֶד: כִּי-          הָיִיתָ עֲזָרְתָה לִּי וּבָצַל כְּנַפְיֶךָ אֲרִגֹּן: דְּבַקְהָ נִפְשִׁי          אֲחִירֶיךָ בִּי תִמְכָּה יְמִינֶךָ:</p>
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- Consider how King David describes his desire in this psalm/prayer? What’s the difference between wanting and “soul thirst?”
- What can you take from King David’s example for how you might speak your desire?

**Exercise: What Do You Want?**

**Instructions:** In pairs, choose one person to ask the other the question first. Ask, “What do you want?” Let the speaker respond for as long as they want, up to 2 minutes. After the speaker responds, ask again “What do you want?” Let the speaker respond for as long as they want, again up to 2 minutes. Then ask a third time, “What do you want?” Again, the speaker has up to two minutes for their response. Take a few moments for quiet journaling with the below prompts before switching roles and repeating the exercise. (6 min each)

**Debrief prompts:**

- What did it feel like to be asked the same question three times?
- What did you notice about any differences in your response over time?

## Clarifying our Desire – Hitbodedut and Turning Torah into Tefila/Prayer

It is also good to make prayers out of lessons. Thus, if one hears a Torah lesson from a true holy person, they should make it into a prayer. They should contemplate everything in the lesson and pray to God that they be worthy of attaining it. They should tell God how far they are from such attainment and beg to be helped to achieve everything in the lesson.

If one then has intelligence and true desire, God will guide them along the path of truth, and they will understand how to reach the goal. They will speak it with beautiful words and true arguments, pleading with God to draw them close to God.

The concept of conversation with God is bound to an extremely high spiritual level. This is especially true when one makes prayers out of Torah lessons. This results in great delight on high.

*-Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, adapted from Lekutei Moharan II:25*

**Practice:** Select anything you have learned today as a focus for your Hitbodedut or Turning Torah into Tefila/Prayer. Focus on your desire/Ratzon to embody or integrate that teaching into your life or for your desire for that teaching or idea to manifest in the world.

You can write or speak out your prayers.