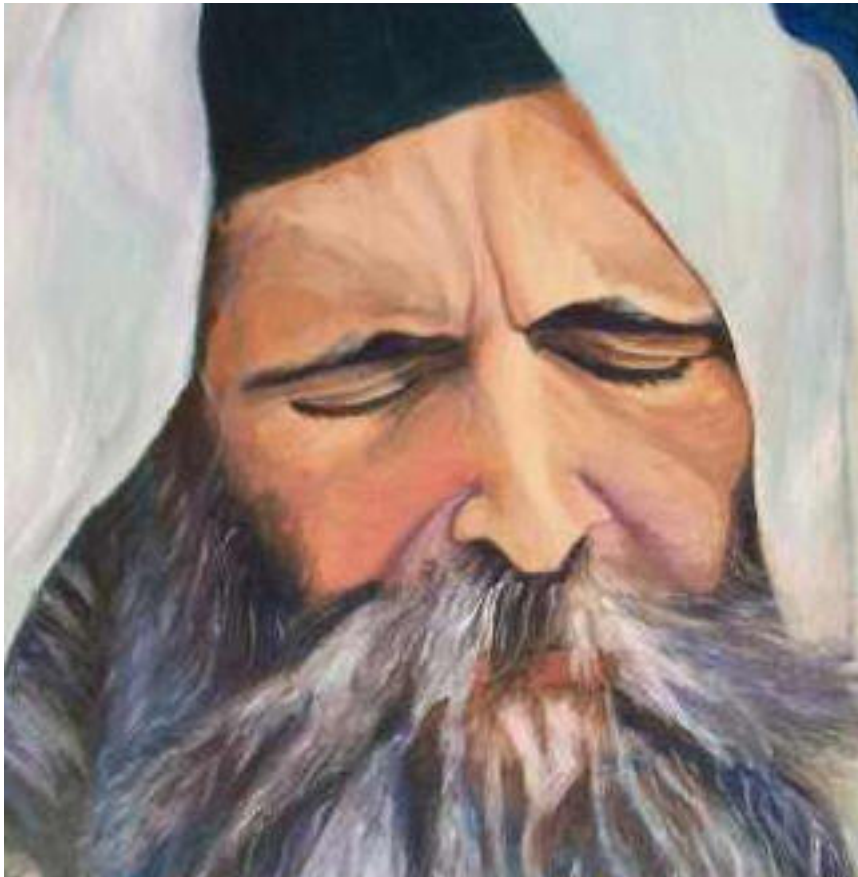


**Portrait of the Humble King: Rebbe Nachman and the Degel**



**Rebbe Nachman, The King and the Wise Man, aka “The Portrait”,**

## Translated, Arnold Band

### Portrait of the king

*For all his spiritual severity and messianic anxiety, Nahman was not averse to comic moods. We have seen a clear protracted satire about the world of demons in "The Cripple"; "The King Who Decreed Conversion" and "The King Who Had No Children" are not devoid of touches of irony. Though dealing with theodicy, one of the central problems perplexing to men of faith, "The King and the Wise Man" is presented as an ironic burlesque —Swiftian without the scatology.*

*The first king, obviously temporal, is puzzled by the titles (attributes) applied to the second king because he cannot envisage a king who is either truthful or humble, and, since he has no portrait of the second king in his gallery, he doubts his existence. The wise man selected to solve this riddle and bring back the portrait has several salient characteristics: He can tell truth from sham and deception; he is relentless in his quest; he is fearless even in his questioning of the second king, obviously God himself. And, in a sense of self-parody, Nahman endowed his wise man with the perception that one can judge a country from the nature of its jokes.*

*When the wise man undergoes his predictably frustrating experiences, which finally bring him to the Supreme Magistrate, God, his report to God of his findings and conclusion regarding the kingdom He apparently rules startles Him. Hearing his praises from such a perceptive and knowledgeable human being, God reduces his substance to nothing so that when the curtain is finally pulled aside, the portrait seen by the wise man —and returned to his own king —is obviously blank. For the perceptive Hasid versed in the intricacies of Bratslav theology, the portrait of God must be blank.*

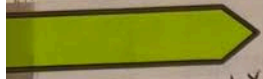
## Nachman, The King and the Wise Man, aka "The Portrait", Translated, Arnold Band

Some scholars make the case that Nachman was an early existentialist, uncertain about God's existence yet determined to assume God was real and continuing to attempt to communicate with God through his technique of *hitbodedut*, speaking to God, even if God did not reply. These scholars, starting with Joseph Weiss and Hillel Zeitlin and continuing with contemporary scholars such as Arthur Green, believe that Reb Nachman ultimately believed that existence is an illusion, and that God, as well, may be illusory. Green points out the story "The Missing Portrait" as an example of the mystery of God's existence, since the king is hidden behind a curtain. Zvi Mark, in contrast, underscores Nachman's mystical beliefs and deep Kabbalistic influence by emphasizing his attempts to cast off his intellect in order to reach God. He believed that God could only be known through imagination, in song, story, or prayer.

**A Palace of Pearls: The Stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav**  
Howard Schwartz

# מעשה ו ממלך ענו

A



ל"ח x גר  
25 | 20

מעשה במלך אחד והיה לו חכם. אמר המלך להחכם: באשר שיש מלך שחותם עצמו שהוא גבור גדול ואיש אמת וענו.

Know

והנה גבור, אני יודע שהוא גבור, מחמת שסביב מדינתו הולך הים, ועל הים עומדים חיל על ספינות עם הורמאטים (א) ואינם מניחים להתקרב. ולפנים מן הים יש, מקום שטובעין בו (שקורין "זומפ") גדול סביב המדינה שאין שם כראם שביל קטן שאינו יכול לילך שם כראם אדם אחד וגם שם עומדים הורמאטים, וכשיבוא אחד להלחם, מורים עם ההורמאטים. ואי אפשר להתקרב לשם. אך מה

Doubt  
Knew

שחותם עצמו איש אמת וענו, זה איני יודע, ואני רוצה שתביא אלי הפאטרעט (ב) של אותו המלך, כי יש להמלך כל הפאטרעטין של כל המלכים, והפאטרעט שלו לא נמצא אצל שום מלך כי הוא נסתר מבני אדם, כי הוא יושב תחת כלה, והוא רחוק מבני מדינתו.

Know

הלך החכם אל המדינה. אמר החכם בדעתו שצריך לו לידע מהות המדינה. ועל ידי מה ידע המהות של המדינה, על ידי הקאטאוויש של המדינה, הינו עניני צחוק (שקורין "קאטאוויש"). [כי קשצריכים לידע דבר, צריכים לידע הקאטאוויש של אותו הדבר, כי יש כמה מיני קאטאוויש: יש אחד שמכון באמת להזיק לחברו בדבריו

B

(א) תוחים. (ב) דמות דיוקנו.

Comedy

# מעשיות

מעשה ו

# ספורי

סד

וכשחברו מקפיד עליו, אומר לו: אני מצחק, כמו שכתוב (ג): כמתלהלה  
 וכו'. ואמר: הלא מצחק אני. וכן יש אחד שמתכונן בדרך צחוק  
 ואף-על-פי-כן חברו נזוק על-ידי דבריו. וכן יש כמה מיני קאטאוויש.  
 ויש בכל המדינות מדינה שכוללת כל המדינות, ובאותה המדינה יש  
 עיר אחת שכוללת כל העירות של כל המדינה שכוללת כל המדינות.  
 ובאותה העיר יש בית אחד, שכוללת כל הבתים של כל העיר,  
 שכוללת כל העירות של המדינה, שכוללת כל המדינות. ושם יש  
 אדם שכלול מכל הבית וכו'. ושם יש אחד שעושה כל הליצנות  
 והקאטאוויש של המדינה. ולקח החכם עמו ממון רב והלך לשם  
 וראה שעושים כמה מיני ליצנות וצחוק, והבין בהקאטאוויש, שהמדינה  
 בלה מלאה שקרים מתחלה ועד סוף, כי ראה שעושים צחוק, איך  
 מאנים ומטעים בני-אדם במשא ומתן ואיך הוא בא לדון  
 בהמאניסטרטאט (ד) ושם בלו שקר ומקבלין שחד. והולך להסאנד (ה)  
 הנבונה יותר, וגם שם בלו שקר, והיו עושים בדרך צחוק אן-שטעלין (ו)  
 מכל הדברים הללו. והבין החכם באותו הצחוק שהמדינה בלה מלאה  
 שקרים ורמאות ואין בה שום אמת, והלך ונשא ונתן בהמדינה.  
 והניח עצמו להונות אותו בהמשא ומתן. והלך לדון לפני הערכאות,  
 והם בלם מלאים שקר ושחדים. וכיום זה נתן להם שחד, למחר לא  
 הכירוהו. והלך לערכאות נבונה יותר, וגם שם בלו שקר עד שבא  
 לפני הסאנאט (ז), וגם הם מלאים שקר ושחדים, עד שבא אל המלך  
 בעצמו. וכשבא אל המלך, ענה ואמר: על מי אתה מלך, שהמדינה  
 מלאה שקרים בלה מתחלה ועד סוף ואין בה שום אמת. והתחיל

Structure

Rings  
with  
rings

Arch  
Corridor  
in  
Center

Higher  
levels  
admits

↓  
Senate  
↓  
Supreme  
Court

↓  
King

[C]

KING SCENE

(ג) משלי כו, יח. (ד) בית משפט עירוני. (ה) בית משפט ממלתי. (ו) מראים עצמם רק לפני. (ז) בית  
 השופטים הזקנים המלכותי.

# ספורי

ממלך ענו

## מעשיות

סה

not  
ner to  
train  
listen

לספר כל השקרים של המדינה. וכשהמלך שמע דבריו, הרבין אָנְיוּ אָצֵל הוּיִלּוֹן לְשִׁמְעַ דְּבָרָיו, כִּי הָיָה תְּמוּהָ לְהַמְלֶכֶת שִׁימְצָא אִישׁ שְׂיֹדַע מְכַל הַשְּׁקָרִים שֶׁל הַמְּדִינָה. וְהַשְּׂרִי-מְלוּכָה שִׁשְׁמְעוּ דְּבָרָיו הָיוּ כּוֹעֲסִים עָלָיו מְאֹד, וְהוּא הָיָה מְסַפֵּר וְהוֹלֵךְ הַשְּׁקָרִים שֶׁל הַמְּדִינָה. עָנָה וְאָמַר,

הַחֲכָם הַזֶּה: וְהָיָה רְאוּי לֹאמַר שְׁגָם הַמְּלֶכֶת כְּמוֹתָם, שֶׁהוּא אוֹהֵב שְׁקַר כְּמוֹ הַמְּדִינָה. אֵךְ מִזֶּה אָנִי רֹאֶה אֵיךְ אַתָּה אִישׁ אֱמֶת, וּבְשִׁבִיל זֶה

sure  
we  
State

אַתָּה רְחוּק מֵהֶם מִחֲמַת שְׂאִין אַתָּה יְכוּל לְסַבֵּל הַשְּׁקָר שֶׁל הַמְּדִינָה. וְהַתְּחִיל לְשַׁבַּח הַמְּלֶכֶת מְאֹד מְאֹד, וְהַמְּלֶכֶת מִחֲמַת שֶׁהָיָה עָנּוּ מְאֹד

Praise

וּבְמִקּוּם גְּדֻלְתּוֹ שֶׁם עֲנוּתָנוֹתוֹ. כִּי כֵן דָּרָךְ הָעָנּוּ, שֶׁבְּכָל מָה שֶׁמְשַׁבְּחִין וּמְגַדְּלִין אוֹתוֹ יוֹתֵר נַעֲשֶׂה קָטָן וְעָנּוּ יוֹתֵר וּמִחֲמַת גְּדֻלַּת הַשְּׁבַח שֶׁל הַחֲכָם שִׁשְׁבַּח וּגְדֻלַּת אֵת הַמְּלֶכֶת בָּא הַמְּלֶכֶת בְּעֲנִיּוֹת וּקְטָנוֹת מְאֹד עַד שֶׁנַּעֲשֶׂה אִין מְשֻׁשׁ. וְלֹא הָיָה יְכוּל לְהִתְאַפֵּק וְהַשְּׁלִיךְ אֵת הוּיִלּוֹן לְרֹאוֹת אֵת אוֹתוֹ הַחֲכָם, מִי הוּא זֶה שֶׁהוּא יוֹדֵעַ וּמְבִין כָּל זֹאת, וְנִתְגַּלָּה פְּנָיו. וְרָאָה אוֹתוֹ הַחֲכָם, וְהִבִּיא הַפֶּאֶטְרַעַט שְׁלוֹ אֶל הַמְּלֶכֶת:

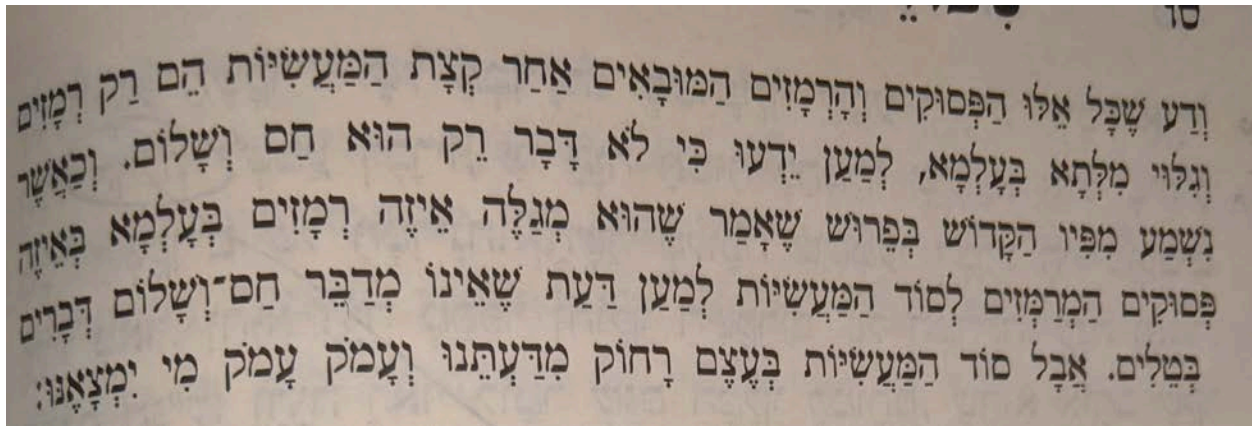
city

דְּרָבִי צִיּוֹן אֲבָלוֹת (ח): צִיּוֹן הִיא בְּחִינַת הַצִּיּוֹנִים שֶׁל כָּל הַמְּדִינוֹת שֶׁבָּלָם נִתְוַעְדִים לְשֵׁם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (ט): וְרָאָה אָדָם וּכְנָה אָצֵלוֹ צִיּוֹן:

וְזָחוּ חַיָּה צִיּוֹן קְרִית מוֹעֲדָנוּ (י) רְאֵשֵׁי-תְבוֹת מְצַח"ק, שִׁשֵּׁם הָיוּ נִתְוַעְדִים כָּל הַצִּיּוֹנִים, וּמִי שֶׁהָיָה צָרִיךְ לִידַע אִם לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדְּבָר אוֹ הַמַּשָּׂא וּמִתֵּן, הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ שֵׁם: יְהִי רְצוֹן שִׁיבְנָה בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ, אָמֵן:

רָאָה וְהָבֵן וְהִבֵּט אַתָּה הַמַּעֲיָן עַד הֵיכָן הַדְּבָרִים מְגִיעִים. אֲשֶׁרִי הַמְּחַכָּה וְיִגִיעַ לִידַע וּלְהַשְׁיֵג מְעַט מְסוּדוֹת הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת הַלָּלוּ, אֲשֶׁר לֹא נִשְׁמְעוּ בְּאֵלָה מְיָמִים קְדָמוֹנִים:

(ח) איכה א, ד. ט) יחזקאל לט, טו. י) ישעיה לג, כ.



In the postscript he writes:

***Darkei Tziyon aveloth/** The paths of Tziyon are mournful” [Lam. 1:4; since the Temple has been destroyed, one is obligated to remember and mourn it, and unbridled joking and laughter are forbidden; see S”A O”C 560. Also, there are no festivals or times when God can be “seen:” Ex. 23:15 etc.].*

***Tziyon** is the aspect of the tziyunim [markers; placemarks] of all the countries, for they all assemble there, as it is written, “vera’ah `etzem adam uvanah etzlo tziyun/ and see the bone of[36] man, then shall he set up a sign by it.” [Eze. 39:15]. This is [the meaning of], “**Chazeih Tziyon Qiryath Mo`adeinu/** Look upon Tziyon, the city of our assemblies” [Isa. 33:20], the acronym of which is **MeTzaCheiQ** (jesting), for that is where all the tziyunim [signs] gathered, and whoever needed to know whether to do something or some business transaction would know it there. May it be His will that it be rebuilt speedily in our days, Amen.*

*Look and discern and gaze, you who peer, how far these matters reach. Fortunate is one who attends and will attain to know and grasp a little of the secrets of these stories, the likes of which have not been heard since ancient times.*

*And know that all of these verses and allusions that are brought after some of the stories are only hints and a scant disclosure of the subject matter, so that they might know that “ki lo-davar reiq hu/ it is not a meaningless thing,” God forbid. As was heard from his holy mouth, saying that he is revealing a few mere hints from a few verses which hint to the secret of the stories, so as to know that he is not saying, God forbid, prattle. But the essential secret of the stories is distant from our knowing; “‘Amoq, `amoq, mi yimtzauen/ Deep, deep; who can find it out?” [Eccl. 7:24]<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Postscript to the story : <https://breslovbooks.com/pdf/english-siporay-masiyos.pdf>  
[http://nanach.altervista.org/STORIES\\_by\\_Rebbi\\_Nachman\\_-\\_Sipurei\\_Maasiyoth\\_2015.pdf](http://nanach.altervista.org/STORIES_by_Rebbi_Nachman_-_Sipurei_Maasiyoth_2015.pdf)

*Joseph Weiss, Scholem's student, presented Rav Nachman as living in paradox of the absence of God. The secret of Kabbalah is that the process is an illusion and that we don't know if God really exists, so we cannot tell the common folk who could not bear the truth. Neither could Weiss, who committed suicide to escape the painful paradoxes of life.<sup>2</sup>*

*Zvi Mark in "Mysticism and Madness" shows that the Existential approach to Rabbi Nachman is incorrect. Rav Nachman is not a forerunner of existential doubt or living with the paradox of an absent God, rather he is literally stark raving mad in order to cast off his intellect to reach God. Almost a century ago, the journalist Hillel Zeitlin went from atheistic Schopenhauer follower to Neo-Hasidic theologian advocating the creation of an elite group of those who truly understood religion seeking religious experience, prophecy, and mysticism. For Zeitlin, neither the rationalism of secular materialism nor the vitalism of Nietzsche pointed to God, rather the madness, stories, and songs of Rav Nachman offered a means of reaching God.<sup>3</sup>*

*Arthur Green continued the approach of Weiss and presented Rabbi Nachman as a non-mystical approach based on expressing one's existential needs in I-Thou dialogue with God, and the need to face the modern Enlightened challenges to faith by an Existential leap of faith. And in Green's brilliant excursive on faith and doubt in Rabbi Nachman, Green shows that the deep secret of creation is that there is ordinary heresy and a deeper heresy from God himself, implying that the secret of Kabbalah may be that God does not exist. Green further develops this absent God from one of Rav Nachman's stories where the portrait of the King in the story is both found in a reflection in a mirror (implying to Green that it is our own projection) and that the King shrinks away (implying that there is no King). Green's work has been translated in several languages and is taken as the actually meaning of Rabbi Nachman in academic circles and literary readers like Rodger Kamenetz.<sup>4</sup>*

For Green, the tale fits well with an allegorical folk-tale plot of a wise man in search of the hidden king, helped by a wizard along the way. However:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gershom Scholem Ve'Yosef Weiss: Halifat Mikhtavim" ("Gershom Scholem and Joseph Weiss: Correspondence, 1948-1964"), edited by Noam Zadoff. Carmel Publishing

<sup>3</sup> Mysticism and Madness: The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, 2009, Continuum Press

<sup>4</sup> Alan Brill, <https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2010/08/18/zvi-mark-%E2%80%93-the-religious-thought-of-rabbi-nachman-of-bratslav-part-1-of-2/>

<sup>5</sup> Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (Jewish Lights Classic Reprint) 1992, 361



helped by a wizard along the way. This works until we try to deal with our fourth character, the king with whom the story opens. This figure, too, as it turns out, can be none but God. Who else would Nahman dare to designate as the king who sends the seeker's soul on its journey into the world? But with this designation, the story again becomes entirely perplexing. Since Nahman's monotheism can safely be presumed, how can the two kings both be God? What does it mean to say that the Lord is lacking His own portrait? And—when the curtain is finally lifted at life's end—could it be that nothing has been accomplished, that the seeker sees before him the very one who sent him? Is life then not some terrible trick, a game played out by a God who wants nothing but endless praises?

For Green the making of the king's portrait is the work of redemption, so that the portrait he brings back is the very portrait of himself including all his triumphs sorrows and life's travails.

*Zvi Mark comes along and says No! No! No! Rabbi Nachman is not an existentialist! he is not waking close to heresy, and he is not suffering the paradoxes of modern life. Rabbi Nachman is a mystic. In Zvi Mark's presentation, Rabbi Nachman is not fascinated by the Enlightenment and its heresies.*

*Rabbi Nachman thinks that the intellect can never reach God. A Litvak, a Maimonidean, or a Maskil are all the same in that they each, God forbid, use their intellect and the only way to God is by the imagination. One can only know God through song, story, and prayer. One must entirely cast off the intellect to be religious. Madness is a paradigmatic life of casting off the intellect. One can also use crying, joking, dancing, play or handclapping.*

*The goal of Rabbi Nachman is the creation of mystical consciousness. Mark states that previous studies "neglected the mystical goal at the center of his thought." Imagination is needed for belief and mysticism, and prophecy. Revelation is not just without intellect but from the removal of intellect Therefore deeds of madness and casting away the intellect is good. There are many levels of mystical experience – highest is the stripping away everything including speech and belief<sup>6</sup>.*

*There is a famous ma'amar of Rav Nachman called "Bo el pharaoh" (Likutei Mehoran I:64) where Rabbi Nachman discusses the void of creation. Arthur Green explains it as the end of our seeking reveals a paradox at end, that the whole process is illusory, and we have a doubt about God's existence at the core of faith. Green, Mark and Magid have dealt with this aspect of his teaching as well.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> Zvi Mark – The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, Alan Brill, <https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/2010/08/18/zvi-mark-%E2%80%93-the-religious-thought-of-rabbi-nachman-of-bratslav-part-1-of-2/>

<sup>7</sup> Shaul Magid "through the Void" The Absence of God in R. Nachman's Likutei Mehoran HTR 88 (1995), 485-519

*Zvi Mark states that Green neglected the parts of the passage where Rabbi Nachman writes that the heresy is raised by song. And song as a form of casting off the intellect can solve problem and lead to a union with the Divine. Mark notes that in this case, Zeitlin<sup>8</sup> was more correct than later scholars in that he understood the role of song as mysticism in the passage. For Green, –we cannot know if there is a God. To reach the highest level we ask God to have our faith shaken. For Mark, not knowing is not a lack of knowledge of God but the wondrous nature of God, a mystical union from casting off the intellect.<sup>9</sup>*

I wanted to look at the tale of the king's portrait with a view to shedding light on the paradoxical atheism/panentheism of Rebbe Nachman and its comparison with another portrait maker used by his uncle the Degel Machaneh Ephraim, in the midrash of King Ashmodai's search for a portrait of Moses.

### **The Tale: Story of a Humble King<sup>10</sup>**

There was once a king who had a wise man. The king said to the wise man, “Since there is a king who signs himself as being very mighty, and a man of truth, and humble.

Now, mighty; I know that he is mighty, since his kingdom is surrounded by the sea, and on the sea stands a navy on warships armed with cannons and they do not allow anyone to come close. And inwards from the sea, surrounding the country there is a large marsh of quicksand, through which there is only one narrow path wide enough for only one person to pass. There too, cannons are positioned, so that if someone comes to attack, the cannons are fired, so that it is impossible to come close to there.

“But what he signs himself as being a man of truth and humble, this I do not know, and I want you to bring me the portrait of this king.” Because the king possesses portraits of all the kings, but the portrait of that king (who signs himself in such a fashion) is not to be found by any king, since he is hidden from people, since he sits under a canopy, and he is far from his own countrymen.

So, the wise man went to that country. He came to the realization that he must discover the essence of this country. *And how can he find out the essence of the country? - by way of its humor (its jokes). Because when one wants to know [the essence of] something, one must know its humor. (For there are many types of humor: -There is one who intentionally means to harm his friend with his words, and when his friend is indignant, he says to his friend, “I am joking!” as in the verse, “As someone who exhausts himself (shooting arrows ...) and says behold I am joking!” (Proverbs 26:18-19). And so, there is someone who intends as a joke, but even still his friend his harmed from his words. -And so, there are many types of humor.)*

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<sup>8</sup> Hillel Zeitlin “R. Nachman mi’Braslav, Life and Teachings, Warsaw 1911

<sup>9</sup> Alan Brill, <https://kavvanah.wordpress.com/tag/zvi-mark/>

<sup>10</sup> Translation by Elliot Ginzburg, in *Tormented Master*, 355

*Now, among all the countries, there is a country that embodies all countries. Within that country there is a city that embodies all cities of that whole country which embodies all the countries. And in that city, there is a house that embodies all the houses of the city that embodies all cities of the country that embodies all countries. There, there is a man who embodies everything in that house, etc. And there, there is a man who embodies all the houses etc. And there, there is someone who makes all the wisecracks and humor of that country.*

So, the wise man took a lot of money with him and went there. He saw them making all types of wisecracks and jokes. He understood from the humor that the entire country was full of falsehood from beginning to end. Because he saw them making jokes of how people are cheated and ripped off in business. And how someone goes to the local court ('ministrate'), and it is complete falsehood and they accept bribery there, and he goes to the higher appellate court ('sand'), and there as well, it is totally corrupt. The people were making caricatures and parodies of all these things.

The wise man understood from this jesting that the entire country is filled with falsehood and deceit, totally lacking any truthfulness. So, he went and made some business deals in the country and allowed himself to be ripped off in the transactions, and he went and brought the cases before the courts, and they were full of falsehood and bribery.

On this day he gave them bribery, the next day they didn't recognize him. So, he went to a higher court, but this too was complete falsehood. Until he came before the supreme court ('senate'), and also there, they are full of falsehood and bribery. Until he came to the king himself.

Now, when he came to the king he spoke up and said, "Over whom are you king? The entire country is full of falsehood, from beginning to end. There is no truthfulness in it at all!" The wise man began to tell over all the falsehood of the country. When the king heard the wise man's words, *he bent his ear to the curtain to listen to them*, for the king was astonished that there existed someone aware of all the falsehood of the country. The royal ministers who heard the wise man's words were very angry at him, and he continued reporting all the falsehood of the country. The wise man then said, "It would be suitable to say that the king is also like them, that he also enjoys falsehood like the country. But from this I see that you are a man of truth, and because of this you keep your distance from them, because you cannot bear the falsehood of the country."

And he began to praise the king very very much. And the king, because he was very humble, *and in the place of his greatness there was his humility*, for that is the way of the humble, that the more they are praised and extolled, the smaller and humbler they become. So, on account of the wise man's great praise, that he praised and extolled the king, the king became very humble and small, until he became literally nothing, *and the king could no longer restrain himself*, so he threw aside the curtain to see this wise man. Who is it that knows and understands all this?

His face was revealed, and the wise man saw it, and brought back his portrait for his king.

Arthur Green begins his semi-autobiographical book with this tale:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology, Jewish lights Publication, 2003

“in the image and likeness of God” that the king sees? And is it not that very image and likeness that is revealed to the seeker? Do not both king and seeker see in that moment that their otherness is not so “other” after all?

In his confessional book this story above all other tales of Rebbe Nachman moves his existential self-identity. The mirroring reflects a mystical view where the adept sees his higher self-mirrored in the divine experience. Green builds a highly individual religious system based on the autonomous authority granted by such experiences.

Furthermore, he is intrigued by the ambiguity (saturated through all Rebbe Nachman’s writings, not confined to this story) which allows him the midrashic precedence to interpret Judaism in a post-modern way. He sees in Rebbe Nachman a heretical/anti-nomian if not heretical streak.

The tale is especially attractive because of its ambiguity. There is something wrong with the story, or at least so it appears on the surface. This is a Jewish story about a king, and everybody knows that in Jewish stories the king is always God. But there are two kings here—the king who is discovered at the end of the tale and the king who sends the wise man on his way in the first place. Which of them is God, and who is the other? Or could they both be God, and how then does the story work? What is it that the wise man sees as the curtain is cast aside at the end of the tale? Is it the king? The One he knew all along, or a new King? Is it God, the eternal Other, or is it perhaps himself? Or does the tale’s ambiguity hint that these lines should not be drawn so firmly? And what of the king—may the same questions not be asked of him? What does he see when the curtain is put aside? What is it that he learns about his kingdom? What does the original king gain in having this new portrait? How does it differ from all the others?

For Zvi Mark, on the contrary, resists the possibility for heresy from the “no image” on the portrait.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary he sees the “no portrait” as one of classical Jewish Theology’s *via*

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<sup>12</sup> *Mysticism and Madness: The Religious Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav*, Zvi Mark  
Bloomsbury Publishing, 21 May 2009, 249-251

*negative*, the negative theological premise that God is so remote from the world due His transcendent infinity and distance from the world. Nothing heretical here! Classical Jewish philosophy!

Then Mark proceeds to the definition of “nothing” in the tale. What does a picture of nothing mean? How does that help in understanding the Divine? Here he moves to the Kabbalistic notion of “ayin” the nothingness of the sefira of *Keter*/crown, meaning beyond description or inter- including everything.

## *Part I. Seeking the Face of the King*

### *I. The Face of the King*

Many components of this story lead to the understanding that the search for the king’s portrait is a search for the face of God, a search that concludes in ‘and the king’s face was revealed, and the sage saw it.’ The king serves in many parables – Hasidic and earlier too – as the ‘King of the universe.’<sup>4</sup> The ‘face’ is a widespread and dominant image used to describe God’s revelation of Himself, and the use of the phrases ‘revelation of the face’ and ‘hiding the face’ is also widespread, as is describing closeness to, revelation of or distance

from God. The use of the term ‘face’ in the description of God’s revelation to Moses in *Exodus*<sup>5</sup> serves as a paradigmatic image of the revelation of God – a model, as we shall see further on, relevant to the story under consideration. In addition, the more concrete image of seeking the ‘face’ in the sense of seeking God may also be found in the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

Both the description of the king as ‘hidden from human beings’ and the description of the curtain that separates him from people are associated with common images referring to God, Who is hidden from the eyes of man, and to the veils separating Him from man.

The two kings in the story are one and the same king – the King of the world – for God, the King, presents man the mission of seeking His face. As the verse states, ‘On Your behalf,<sup>9</sup> my heart said, “All of you, seek my face.” And your face, Hashem, will I seek.’<sup>10</sup>

This story presents an example of negative theology, in which the recognition of God is based on the distance between God and the world, and man's knowledge of God is knowledge through negation. Man only knows that God is not the world; by looking at the world, he can know what God is not. Therefore, paradoxically, a land filled with falsehood teaches about an honest king.

'And his face was revealed, and the sage saw him and he brought his portrait to the king.' What does the portrait of the king look like? What is the image of his face? In the process described in the story, the more the sage praises the king, the smaller the king grows, 'until he became literally nothing.' At this point, the king casts aside the curtain, his face is revealed, and the sage sketches him. But since we know that the king became 'literally nothing,' clearly the sage came away with a blank portrait, on which only the 'nothing' was delineated.

This point of the story combines with and supports the direction of the interpretation introduced earlier that it is impossible to see and draw the face of the king. What can be learned of the king's face comes only by way of negation; in the end, the picture remains blank. Still, it should be emphasized that this process of removing the curtain and revealing the king's face is described positively in the story as giving the sage what he seeks. The sage attains a revelation not attained by the people, a revelation without a curtain, revealing the king as 'nothing.'

We can explain the revelation of the king as 'nothing' in various ways. If we understand 'nothing' solely in the sense of emptiness, nothingness and negation, we may conclude that the king is revealed to the protagonist at the end of his search as not existing – that there is no God and no one to draw – and so the sage returns from his search for the face of the king with a blank portrait. This explanation, if true, would divulge a radical secret heresy in R. Nachman of Bratslav's story. But as appealing this interpretation may be to some, it does not concur well with R. Nachman's story, for we cannot understand the 'nothing' in the story without the Hasidic-kabbalistic context of the term 'nothing.'<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately Mark is unsure as to the relative weight of philosophy vs mysticism in the story.

This is where he hits upon paradoxical theology of Rebbe Nachman<sup>13</sup>. Being and nothing has been described by Rachel Elior in her analysis of Rebbe Nachman's work.<sup>14</sup> For Elior the ingredients characteristic of the zaddik included the following:

- 1 charisma anchored in spiritual authority which derives its strength from the consciousness of direct contact with God.
- 2 the dialectic tension between the divine 'nothing' and the auspicious flow of divine 'bounty' on which the existence of the Zaddik is founded, a tension reflected in his self-annulment and humility on the one hand and his ecstatic exaltation and *devekut* (attachment to, communion with, God) on the other.
- 3 a call to operate simultaneously on the metaphysical and earthly planes, or to maintain contact with the divine 'nothing' (*ayin*) and the material 'being' (*yesh*), which requires conflicting states of consciousness.

It is difficult to decide the extent of the philosophical foundation of R. Nachman's 'The Story of the Humble King.' On the one hand, as we will see, there is reason to assume a philosophical background, not only because of a multitude of corresponding details, but also because of the structure of the story, which describes negation as preceding the revelation of the king's face. It is not the experience of the revelation of God's face that brings about the description of God's otherness and distance; on the contrary, the revelation of 'nothingness' results from the adopted activity of negation. On the other hand, the negation in the story can be seen not only as a philosophical service, but as giving expression to an experience whose exalted nature and attendant awareness of the divine 'otherness' intensifies until arriving at last at a mystical experience of the revelation of the divine countenance.

Yaakov Azriel suggests we compare the finding of "nothing" when the king reveals himself, with the story of the Lost Princess, in that she is all we have to look for:

*This idea, which is only hinted at in the opening of "The Losing of A King's Daughter," is expanded upon and elucidated in Story Number Six ("The Modest King") in Rabbi Nachman's "Book of Stories from Ancient Times."*

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<sup>13</sup> I have described this in my essay "Quantum Hassidut" in <http://www.jyungar.com/theological-essays>

<sup>14</sup> Between Yesh and Ayin: The Doctrine of the Zaddik in the Works of Jacob Isaac, the Seer of Lublin  
Authors Rachel Elior 1988 Journal Jewish History: Essays in Honor of Chimen Abramsky, 59.

*In this story, the king's servant is commanded to draw a portrait of the king who is always concealing himself; when the king's servant finally succeeds in having the king pull back the curtain which had concealed him, all that the king's servant can see is Nothing.*

*Although it is impossible to see the King, Rabbi Nachman stresses the point that it is possible to make contact with the King's daughter, as happens in our story. Thus, the quest to know God becomes transformed into the quest for the King's daughter.*

*While the King reveals Himself only at the very beginning of the story and then no longer plays an active role in the unfolding of the plot, the Lost Princess does appear from time to time and does communicate with the king's chamberlain.*

*It therefore becomes imperative to seek her, to make contact with her, and ultimately to aspire to redeem her. Consequently, it is essential to decode and decipher what the Lost Princess represents.<sup>15</sup>*

He conflates the king with the king's daughter whereas Rebbe Nachman throughout his work keeps the lost princess/malchut/Schechinah quite separate of not totally opposite to the unknown king/Hakadosh Baruch Hu/infinite divine.

In my discussions with Reb Hershey Worch, who comes from an Ishbizt viewpoint, I asked him to comment on the story which he kindly provided his notes:

### **Reb Hershey comments: THE HUMBLE KING**

There was a certain king who had a wise man.

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Who is the king and who the wise man?

Let's assume that the king is the Neshama, because the Neshama is fascinated by only one thing, The Great King!

So, your Neshama needs your help, your intellectual, spiritual or emotional help in accessing God. Because your Neshama is stuck to your flesh and blood, trapped inside you, but you in your imagination, in your rationale and comprehension, have the ability to leave your body and go beyond all boundaries.

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The king said to the wise man:

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<sup>15</sup> THE QUEST FOR THE LOST PRINCESS IN RABBI NACHMAN OF BRASLAV'S "BOOK OF STORIES FROM ANCIENT TIMES" , YAKOV SHAMMAI AZRIEL, PHD University of South Africa 2003



"There is one king who signs himself as being 'mighty, great and a man of truth and humility'. As for his being mighty, I know he is mighty because his kingdom is surrounded by the sea and in the sea stands a fleet of warships with cannons, which will not allow anyone to draw near. Inland from the sea is a deep moat that goes around the whole kingdom. To get in, there is only one tiny pathway wide enough for only one man, and there too stand cannons. If someone comes to make war, they fire with the cannons. It is impossible to get near.

"However, as for his signing himself 'a man of truth and humility', I don't know. I therefore want you to bring me a portrait of that king."

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Reb Nachman says: The Gadlus and Koach of the Creator is obvious. Just look at the world. It's great, so He is much greater.

And I know how mighty He must be, because He is surrounded by the Torah/Sea - the sea is the only way to approach His kingdom - and yet trying to access God through Torah is a good way to get shot to bits

No matter how hard you try and penetrate the Torah to get a fix on God, the blinder you become. The Torah has ways of dazzling you and diverting you and repelling you, to prevent you SEEING God. You can worship God in the Torah, but can you access Him and SEE Him in it?

And if you manage to penetrate the Torah and discover a pathway that leads you to the palace, you find yourself stymied by another problem, Pride or Memory or Fatigue or something.

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This was because this king had portraits of all the kings, but there was no portrait of that king in any king's collection. The reason was that he was hidden from everybody. He sat behind a veil, remote from the people of his country.

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Portraits of God are common. Every attribute and accident of God is described and depicted in Tanakh and Chazal, in Talmud, Midrash and Aggadah. Name your Midda and there's a Chazal talking all about it. Because that stuff is all intuitive and self-explanatory.

But True and Humble? What does it even mean when we say that God is True and Humble? How does the concept even apply, when all concepts are, by definition, false? Concepts are definitions, and there are no definitions of God. We use them because they're useful to us, but they're not True. They help us imagine God and so allow us to worship Him, but they're not even close to being accurate. So, the statement that God is a Man of Truth is an absurdity, all statements about God are absurd. So, the statement about God being truthful is the most absurd of all.

If it could be proven that the statement "God is a Man of Truth" is true, God Himself would be a lie.

As for God's being a Humble Man, that's nothing but an oxymoron - a sharp bluntness or dull sharpness.

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The wise man went to the country. He realized that he needed to find out the nature of the country. How do you find out the nature of a country? You find it out through the people's humor. When you want to know something, you should find out how people laugh and joke about it.

There are different kinds of jokes. Sometimes a person may really want to hurt another with words, but when the other takes exception to his words, he says, "I only meant it as a joke". "Like one who exerts himself to cast firebrands and arrows. and then says, I am only joking" (Proverbs 26:18-19). There are other times when a person may say something that is truly intended as a lighthearted joke, yet his friend is hurt by his words. Thus, there are various different kinds of jokes and humor.

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Interestingly Reb Nachman doesn't give us any clue about how the wise man got past the cannons and the shooting and the other stuff... Because places that are inaccessible to the Neshama are accessible to the individual, wise men go freely where kings fear to tread. Because the earthly, flesh-and-blood, megusham you doesn't have to cross any water to get there to the country of the Great King - you live there. It's in your body.

First of all, Reb Nachman says, forget gravity. If you want to come along with me on this journey, you're gonna havta lighten up. If you're going to be deadly serious about all this, go home, 'cos this is not going to work. What I'm about to tell you is a joke. Not the kind of joke you're probably used to, which ends up with someone or other getting his feelings hurt, accidentally or on purpose.

I'm letting you in on the Sod of Humor, these are mysteries, so put a smile on your face and stop looking so serious, or else it will go whizzing past your head without entering your ears or eyes.

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And among all the different kingdoms there is one kingdom that includes all kingdoms. In that kingdom is one city that includes all the cities of the entire kingdom that includes all kingdoms. In that city is one house which includes all the houses of the whole city that includes all the cities of the kingdom that includes all kingdoms. And there is one man who includes everything in that entire house. And there is also someone who produces all the mockery and joking of the kingdom.

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Which part of the body, what human physical function is, frankly and not to put too fine a point on it, a joke?

Why, Sex, of course. It's ridiculous! Seen from any perspective other than the Sex-Drive forcing us to procreate, the whole business is a Joke. Looked at with anything other than Lust or Prurience, a rutting couple are ludicrous.

But you know what?

There's one Sephira which combines all the others, one Tzadik who encompasses all the middot. One malchut that conquers all others and includes all others. And there's one man, YOU, who owns all the equipment, the hormones, the stimuli, the lust, the bed and, and, and the partner even.

There's Midas Yesod which is *כי כל בשמים וארץ ומתרגמין דאחיד בשמ"א*.

So, you're going to tell me that the Tzadik Yesod Olam has sexual intercourse?

No, of course not. He wouldn't dream of it. He doesn't dream of it. That's why he's the Tzadik Yesod Olam.

Nu, so who's the little "man who produces all the mockery and joking of the kingdom."?

Who if not the Tzadik?

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The wise man took with him a large sum of money and went there and saw how they were mocking and joking in various ways. From the humor, he understood that the entire kingdom was full of lies from beginning to end. He saw the way they would joke about how people defrauded and deceived others in business, and how the injured party would sue in the lower courts where everything was lies and bribery. He would then go to a higher court, where everything was also lies. They used to put on comedies about all these kinds of things.

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The large sum of money is the Kesef - Desire, 'cos that's what you need if you're gonna explore your sexuality.

Nu, so examine your sexuality and see what's going on. Where are all the holy Sephirot combined in it? Watch yourself in the act and you're hardly even there. You're cheating on your own wife inside your head while having sex with her! Gevalt. Go do your business with her and see for yourself; allow yourself to be defrauded of the true experience of intimacy and compare it with what the ideal is supposed to be about.

Talk to your better nature, take yourself to court, sue yourself in Chokhma and Bina, see how far you get with a verdict. As soon as you try having sex next time none of it will matter again, and your body will cheat you out of Oneness again...

Your *Ehrlichkeit* will write checks your morality bank will not honor, your frum persona will make promises your flesh will dishonor.

Go to the *frumest*, holiest, most caring place in yourself and see if you get any justice - ten minutes later you're back online at the same website... Look over your own shoulder and you'll see your *Dayanim, Chokhma, Bina and Daat*, looking past your shoulder at the dirty pictures on the screen. Yeh, Yeah, impartial judges, honest judges, incorruptible judges, right. Good luck with that!

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Through their humor the sage understood that the entire kingdom was filled with lies and deceptions and that there was no truth anywhere. He did some business in the kingdom, allowing himself to be defrauded in the transaction. He took the case to court, but the court was all lies and bribes. One day he would give them a bribe but the next day they would not recognize him. He went to a higher court, and there too it was all lies. Eventually he came before the Supreme Court, but they too were full of lies and bribery.

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Nu, what are you going to do?

Time for a word with God.

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Finally, he came to the king himself.

When he came to the king, he said, "Who are you king over? The whole kingdom is full of lies from beginning to end and there's no truth in it."

He began enumerating all the lies in the kingdom. When the king heard his words, he turned his ear to the veil to hear what he was saying. The king was surprised that there was anyone who knew about all the lies in the kingdom.

\*\*\*\*\*

God is not surprised by all the lies, duh!

He's the Great Liar.

Who wrote the genetic code, but God?

Who wrote this piece of code in the DNA of all living things that puts procreation above all other imperatives?

Yah!

There are no senseless and irrational risks that the most cautious rational being will not take in order to procreate. Life, Liberty, Health, Wealth and Reputation are nothing against the imperious dictates of Lust.

Earlier we asked: Nu, so who's the little "man who produces all the mockery and joking of the kingdom."? Who if not the Tzadik?

Well, the wise man realized that the man producing the mockery and jokery is God. God's the joker in the pack. God's responsible for all the ribald laughter, the dirty jokes, the prats and pitfalls, the banana-strewn paths of lust and sex.

"You know who's messing with me?" he asked, "God! It's God from start to finish. It's all God."

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The ministers of state who heard what he was saying were very angry with him. Yet he went on telling about all the lies in the kingdom.

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No one wants to hear this truth, least of all the morality police. No one wants to talk about this. They tried to shut him down with shouts of "Apikores, Sheygetz, Menuval, Choteh-uMachti, מגלה פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה" and all the rest of that frum schtick.

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"It would be proper to say," declared the wise man, "that the king too is like them - that he loves falsehood just as his kingdom does. But from this I see that you are a man of truth: you are far from them because you cannot stand the falsehood of the country."

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But you see what it is? The king was not surprised by all the monkey-business going on in the kingdom. Like Reb Nachman says, "When the king heard his words, he turned his ear to the veil to hear what he was saying. The king was surprised that there was anyone who knew about all the lies in the kingdom."

The king was only surprised that there was someone willing and daring and intrepid enough to go right up to the very veil behind which God sits and speak the truth out loud.

The fact is, God, You're the coder writing my sexuality. "And it would be proper to say that God too is like them, writing code with malware intrinsic to the program. Programs that trip you up and wipe your face in blotte. Giving commands that make you do the evil opposite of the good you intended when you try and execute the command..."

"But you know what? I've just realized that you don't just write the code and watch me break a leg when I try and execute a command. You don't just write the jokes and then watch me get rotten tomatoes thrown at me when I tell your jokes on stage. You don't do that."

"You are actually the stand-up comic on the stage telling my jokes. You are the one who presses the hard-return key that triggers the command-bat. file which disrupts the program that crashes the hard-drive in your own computer..."

You're not the Great Liar, You're the Great Truth Teller! Because You are Tzadik in my Yesod. You never leave and You never turn Your back. You flow in my every orgasm and stick with me in my every fantasy. Wow, is that awesome or what?

All the pleasure I get from my sexual sensations and feelings and emotions and thoughts are You, God, in the flesh, in my actual penis nerves. You are my pleasure!

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The wise man began to praise the king greatly. But the king was very humble, and "in the place of His greatness, there is His humility" (Megillah 31a). Such is the way of the humble person. The more he is praised and magnified, the smaller and humbler he becomes. Because of the sage's great praise, extolling and magnifying him, the king reached the utmost humility and smallness until he became literally nothing. He could not contain himself, and he threw aside the veil to see who this wise man was that knew and understood all this.

His face was revealed, and the sage saw it and brought his portrait back to the king.

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You see what it is, my friend. Your nightmare only has the power to scare you, even though you, in your dream, are afraid to death of it. Once you wake to the fact that your nightmare can do you no actual harm, it loses even the power to scare you, and you are free of the nightmare.

So, the wise man began to praise the king greatly. I wish I could praise God in my body all the time, or even some of the time, or even once in a while.

But I'm so busy listening to the shouts of the "ministers of state who heard what he was saying were very angry with him" that I don't approach the veil behind which He sits waiting to hear me speak.

If I did, I would catch a glimpse, a laugh, a thrill, a shock of frisson, a blush, a shiver, a sigh of sheer pleasure.

H



In reading about the desire for a portrait I was reminded by an enigmatic midrash regarding king Ashmodai (or in other sources an Arabian king) who desired to have a portrait of Moses done in order to behold the source of his greatness. Here too the artist comes away with a paradoxical image of the great Moses although one unexpected by the reader.

For me, Rebbe is comparing this portrait to a midrashic portrait, that of another Tzaddik Moses. The legend goes as follows:

A “*davar nechmad*” by the Tiferes Yisroel to Masechet Kidushin Mishna 4:14

Commenting on the Mishnah’s aphorism **טוב שְׁפָרוּפָאִים, לְגִיהֶנָּם**.

“The best of doctors are destined for Gehenna,” The Tiferes Yisroel attempts to soften the impact of such a dire prediction for faithful doctors!

**י ב י ן**

**תפארת ישראל**

עד כ"ל דאין מאמר זה גנאי לרופא, רק שבח הרופא המומחה. וכמ"ש חז"ל  
והוא על פי מה שמ"כ דצר נחמד\* שכתבוליא משה רבינו ע"ה בחזק הגוף  
את ישראל ממזרים, שמעו עמוס ירגזון וגו', ויחמהו מאד על זה מלאכתו נע  
האיש משה, כי על ידו נעשו כל הגזרות והנפלאות האלו. ולכן הדר הוא,  
התעורר מלך ערביי א' וישלח צייר מוצחר לצייר תמונת המנהיג המניעות ו  
הגדול הזה ולהביאו אליו. וילך הצייר ויציר תמונתו ויביאהו לפני לר"א בן  
המלך. וישלח שוב המלך ויביא ויאסף יחדיו כל חכמי חרשים אשר באמיתיות  
לו, וישאל להם לשפוט על פי פרצוף פניו של משה כפי המצוייר, ולא כל כך  
לדעת תכונת טבעו ומדותיו, וצמה כמו גדול. ושיצו כל החכמים עוצר לקו  
יחדו אל המלך ויאמרו, אם נשפט על פי ציור קלסחר פניו של לפעמים  
האיש הזה המפורסם לגדול, נאמר לאדונינו כי הוא רע מעללים, ואחפלה ג  
בגאות וחסדמת הממון וצשרירות הלב, ובכל חקרונות שבעולם שיגנו ולפעמים  
נפש אדם המעלה. ויקצוף המלך מאד ויאמר, מה זה. הכי תתעללו ויסולקו מ  
בני הלא בכל אלה שמעתי מכל עזר ופינה צהפך מזה האיש הגדול. רוב המני  
ויחרדו האנשים מאד. ושיצו את המלך בשפל קול התחנה, ויתנצלו בזה, לא י  
א"ע הצייר והחכמים, כל א' בחסרון ידיעת חזירו. הצייר אמר, אני מלבד מה  
ציירתי כהוגן, והחכמים שגו בידיעתם, והחכמים גללו כל החסרון כמ"ש ד'  
על הצייר שלא צייר תמונת משה כהוגן. והמלך אשר נכסף לדעת זאת הלא  
מי משניהן יצדק, נסע ברכבו וצפרשיו ויבוא אל תוך מחנה ישראל. ג"כ הקו  
\* כעין סיפור זה נזכר בשיטה מקובצת ספ"ג דנדרים (ת"י) וע"י נועם המדות סוף אות מ'

*There is a great story about Moshe Rabbeinu's merit recorded in the above commentary Tiferet Yisrael on the Mishnah. 'When Moshe brought the Jews out from Egypt all the nations heard and trembled. And they wondered greatly concerning this man, Moshe, who by his hand so many miracles were wrought.*

*Therefore, one Arabian king decided to send his royal artist to portray Moshe's image and bring it to him. When he brought back the picture, the king gathered all the occult scholars of the realm. He asked them to analyze the physiognomy before them and reconstruct all his character traits for the purpose of discerning whence his power derived.*



*They came as a group before the king and said, "If we were to report on this famous man as portrayed in this painting, we would have to declare that this is an extraordinarily evil individual. His traits include vanity, avarice, coldhearted-ness, in short all the negative traits in the world.? The king exploded, 'How can this be?! Haven't I heard from every source available the exact opposite of this?'* The gathered scholars trembled. An argument broke out between the artist and the scholars each claiming the incompetence of the other.

*The king who burned to know the truth, traveled to the camp of Israel in the desert. He went with cavalry and chariots, and entered the camp. Upon his entry he saw Moshe, the man of God, in the distance and rushed up to him pulling out the picture as he went. And he looked exactly as portrayed in the drawing. His heart felt faint, and he was overwhelmed by doubts.*

*He approached Moshe, bowed before him, and related all that had transpired. He said, 'At first I thought the artist missed the true image, but now I see he hit the mark, so it must be that my scholars have failed me.'*

*But Moshe, the man of God, responded, 'No, both your painter and your scholars are wonderful in their abilities. But you should know, that if I were like my true nature as was described to you, I'd be as useful as dry wood...I am not embarrassed to tell you that all the shortcomings and failings which were judged within me are all connected to my nature, and perhaps even more than they surmised. And I, with great strength, have combated and defeated them, until I have acquired for myself an opposite, second nature. And it's for this very reason that I am respected both in heaven above and earth below.'*

Knowing full well Prof Sid Leiman's excellent research into the veracity of this legend and its possible local borrowing<sup>5</sup> the story is cited in the Degel Machaneh Efrayim, Reb Nachman's uncle in the name of the BESHT, his grandfather. Leiman does acknowledge the legend as follows:

**from a non-Jewish source. It was a well known legend in hasidic circles, and appeared in print as early as 1809 in R. Moses of Pshevorsk's *Or Pnei Moshe al ha-Torah*.<sup>15</sup> R. Moses, a third generation hasidic master, died in 1806. He cites the story approvingly, indicating that he heard it said that the story appears in a book of exempla. In other words, for R. Moses of Pshevorsk, it was still an oral teaching, which allegedly was available in print. Some four editions of the *Or Pnei Moshe* appeared in print before 1843, the year Lipschutz first published his commentary on Mishnah Kiddushin. Thus, Lipschutz meant what he said when he introduced his**

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<sup>5</sup> Sid Z. Leiman, "R. Israel Lipschutz and the Portrait of Moses Controversy," in Isadore Twersky, ed., Danzig, Between East and West (Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 51-63. Suggests it is of Greek origin see op cit.

Later critical editions of the Tiferes Yisroel commentary on the Mishna (Kiddushin) did not confirm the citation.<sup>6</sup>

What was clearly known to Rebbe Nachman whether legend or parable, was the portrait painter sent to paint the picture of the Tzaddik comes back with a demonic portrait.

The Degel, his uncle uses the Gemoro (Bechorot 5a) to expound on the complaint of the Israelites that Moses was a “*kuyyusta*”

“**Additionally, Kontrokos asked Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai:**

*With regard to the collection of silver by Moses for the Tabernacle, you find that the total amount is 201 talents and eleven maneh, as it is written that they amassed:*

**“A beka a head, that is, half a shekel, of the shekel of the Sanctuary...for 603,550 men”** ..  
.....(*Exodus 38:26*),

which totals 301,775 shekels. This sum equals 201 talents and eleven maneh, as each talent contains 1,500 shekels, or sixty maneh, and each maneh contains twenty-five shekels.

יהי מאת ככר הכסף לצקת וגו' משה רבכם גנב היה או (שמות לח. כו) ובנתינת הכסף אתה מוצא מאת ככר דכתיב  
קוביוסטוס היה או אינו בקי בחשבונות נתן מחצה ונטל מחצה ומחצה שלם לא החזיר

But with regard to the giving of the silver to the Tabernacle you find only one hundred talents, as it is written:

**“And the hundred talents of silver were for casting”**  
.....(*Exodus 38:27*).

**Now, was Moses your teacher a thief, or was he a gambler [*kuyyustus*], or was he not expert in accounting? He gave half of the money for the Tabernacle and took half for himself, and he did not return even a complete half to the Tabernacle.**

Kuyyustus according to Jastrow:

קוביוסטוס in. for for ים; ים = קוביוסטוס; ים = קוביוסטוס, 8.) gambler; (= קוביוסטוס) crafty person. Yalk. Deut. 847 זי רמא קי רב' this man is a gambler, and he may go and gamble and lose &c. Tosef. B. Bath. IV, 7 . . . ימימי' if one sells a slave . . ., and he turns out to be a thief or a crafty person (swindler), contrad. to ימימי' Y. ib. VII, end, 12<sup>d</sup>; Bab. ib. 92<sup>b</sup>. Hull. 91<sup>b</sup> ימימי' art thou a thief or a burglar that thou art afraid of the morning?; Yalk. Gen. 133. Bekh. 5<sup>a</sup> ימימי' . . . your teacher Moses was either a thief or a swindler, or else a bad arithmetician.

<sup>6</sup> Sid Leiman traces it back to a Greek source. In the end he says that whether people like this story a lot or rail against it as inappropriate depends on people's world view. People that believe that the highest level is to do mitzvot naturally would tend to dislike this story. Those who feel that the highest level is to do mitzvot via having worked to want to do them because G-d said to would tend to favor this story in this form.

The Degel makes us of this legend to insist that what made Moses the Tzaddik was precisely his being born "mixed with good and bad"

**'וראו בני ישראל את פני משה כי קרן עור פני משה והשיב משה את המסוה על פניו וכו**

יש בזה דברים עמוקים ונפלאים אשר הראני ה' בזה ע"ד ששמעתי מן אא"ז זללה"ה על הא דאמר משה רבכם קוביוסטוס הוא או גונב נפשות

להבין זה גם להבין והביטו אחרי משה איך דור דעה כדורו של משה יביטו אחרי משה ובפרט שיחשדו אותו באשת איש

ופי' הוא ז"ל כי משה רבינו נולד בבחי' שיהיה רשע גמור ויהיה לו כל המדות רעות אך שהוא היפך ושיבר כל המדות רעות והשתדל רק להכניס עצמו במדות טובות ע"כ

ויש לפרש דבריו הקדושים כי ידוע בכוננת הקטורת כי מה"ש במילואו הוא מספר מות ונמתק ונעשה האמת עיי"ש ולכך משה היה בו כלול שני בחינות טוב שהוא האמת ורע גמור שהוא מות ולכך הם לא הבינו ולא הסתכלו אל האמת וראו רק הבחי' הרע שהיה בו והיינו הצירוף של מות הרומז בשמו ולכך והביטו אחרי משה היינו שלא הסתכלו רק בחי' אחרים של משה וחשדוהו גם באשת איש כנ"ל שהיה נולד בבחי' כל המדות רעות

אבל כאן כשהוריד הלוחות מן השמים כתיב ויראו בני ישראל כי קרן עור פני משה ע"ד בתורתו של ר' מאיר היה כתוב כתנות אור בא' וזהו הרמז כי קרן היינו האיר אור פני משה שעשה מן בחי' רע שלו שהוא עור אור בא' ודבק עצמו אל בחי' האמת שבו שהוא אור פני מלך חיים וזהו והשיב את המסוה על פניו

כי מסוה הוא מספר אלף ע"ד ואאלפך חכמה היינו שהיה מדבק עצמו לחכמה אמיתי'

או י"ל אלוף לשון מופלא ומכוסה היינו שאז ראו בו שגם בהולדו היה בו בחי' הטוב והאמת ג"כ אך שהיה בהעלם ומכוסה ועתה בא להתגלות והבן

The Degel poses to verses that reflect the positionality of the Israelites vis a vis Moses' body.

In the first, our citation Ex 34:35

לה וראו בני ישראל את פני משה, כי קרן עור פני משה; והשיב משה את המסוה על פניו, עד-באו לדבר אתו. {ס}

35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face sent forth beams; and Moses put the veil back upon his face, until he went in to speak with Him. {S}

And three verses earlier Ex 34:30

ל וַיֵּרָא אֶהְרֹן וְכָל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶת-  
מֹשֶׁה, וְהִנֵּה קָרְנוֹ, עֹר פָּנָיו; וַיִּירָאוּ,  
מִקֶּשֶׁת אֱלֹהֵי.  
30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses,  
behold, the skin of his face sent forth beams; and they were  
afraid to come nigh him.

Contrasting with Ex 33:8

ח וְהָיָה, כִּצְאֹת מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָאֱהָלָה, יִקְוּמוּ  
כָּל-הָעָם, וַנִּצְבּוּ אִישׁ פֶּתַח אֶהְלֹו;  
וְהִבִּיטוּ אַחֲרַי מֹשֶׁה, עַד-בֹּאוֹ הָאֱהָלָה.  
8 And it came to pass, when Moses went out unto the Tent,  
that all the people rose up, and stood, every man at his tent  
door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the  
Tent.

Where in the former verses the Israelites see his face and the latter they looked “after” Moses implying his back.

This facing the front versus the back he then contrasts the good vs the bad within Moses. When they saw his back (*achorayim* as in the kabbalistic demonic side of the sefirot) they saw him as a *kuyyusta* since they were mirroring his dark side. When he came down the mountain with his face shining they saw the front/good side of him which then explained the verse “Moses put the veil back upon his face,” meaning that until now they had seen the mask of evil only from his birth, from the “*sirtutin*” on his forehead which revealed his essence, (the *Chochmas haPatrzuf* from Zohar) <sup>7</sup> the “mask” meaning the hidden nature of his good qualities now revealed since he had transformed the evil *sirtutin* to good.

או י"ל כי קרן עור פני משה וכו' כי ידוע מה שנזכר בתיקונים מהות האדם ומעשהו הן טוב הן ביש ניכר בשרטוטין שלו שעל פניו וידיו ע"ש והנה כשנולד בוודאי היו השרטוטין שלו מרמזים על בחי' הרע שלו שנולד בזה והוא שאמר כי קרן היינו האיר עור פני משה עור דווקא היינו השרטוטין שלו שנתהפך מביש לטב והיו מראה על בחי' הטוב והאמת שהתדבק ב

Comparing Rebbe Nachman's portrait maker of the king to the portrait maker of Moses reveals an interesting contrast.

The Arabian king desires to see a portrait of Moses in order to understand his prophetic powers, whereas the Breslovian king desires to see the humble king and sends an artist to paint a picture, because “*But what he signs himself as being a man of truth and humble, this I do not know, and I want you to bring me the portrait of this king*”. The object of the portrait is Moses and the Humble King. The picture in one looks demonic and is the very opposite of what Moses represented. In the other the humility of the person is reflected in an ever diminishing portrait until there is nothing left.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Partzufim>

For the Degel the Arabian king's portrait of Moses reflected his darker side and in fact was true. The mirror effect depended on what side of him was seen, his behind/demonic side or his front/face/good side. His middos both good and evil are present and in balance. The face covering reflected that hiddenness of his good middos which were only revealed now.

The notion of contingency of all our efforts in religious observance has bearing on the meaning of the tale, for if the portrait turns out to be nothing then what is the purpose of our worship, Torah learning and Mitzvot? In the Humble king the portrait mirrors the ayin the nothingness of the humble king and maybe the artist? In the Aggadah of Moses the artist picks up on the darker side of Moses that was either conquered by his good side or hidden until the revelation brought out the shining side of his face.

In the Humble King Mark points out the importance of the “as if” or “as though” one's divine service had objective meaning in the larger scale of things, the only thing of value is the desire and yearning which can never be fulfilled:

וְלַעֲבַד הָאֵלִים יוֹדֵעַ מִי הוּא שְׂיֻכַּל לֹמֵר שְׂיַעֲבֹד אֶת הַלֵּל גְּדֹלַת הַבּוֹרָא יִתְבַּרַּךְ מִי שְׂיֻדַּע מַעֲט מְגִדְלָתוֹ יִתְבַּרַּךְ אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ אִיךָ יָכוֹל לֹמֵר שְׂיַעֲבֹד אוֹתוֹ יִתְבַּרַּךְ וְשׁוּם מְלֶאֶךְ וְשָׂרָף אֵינִי יָכוֹל לְהִתְפָּאֵר עַל זֹאת שְׂיֻכַּל לַעֲבֹד אוֹתוֹ יִתְבַּרַּךְ רַק הַעֲקָר הוּא הַרְצוֹן לְהִיּוֹת רְצוֹנוֹ חֶזֶק וְתַקִּיף תָּמִיד לְהִתְקַרֵּב אֵלָיו יִתְבַּרַּךְ וְאֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהַכֹּל חֲפָצִים וְרוֹצִים לַעֲבֹדוֹ אֵף עַל פִּי כֵן אֵין כָּל הַרְצוֹנוֹת שְׂוִי וְיֵשׁ חֲלוּקִים רַבִּים בְּרְצוֹן אֶפְלוּ בְּאֵדָם אֶחָד בְּעֶצְמוֹ כָּל עַת וּבְכָל רִגַע יֵשׁ חֲלוּקִים גְּדוּלִים בֵּין הַרְצוֹנוֹת וְהַכֹּל, שְׂעָקָר הוּא הַרְצוֹן וְהַפְסוּפִין שְׂיִהְיֶה כּוֹסֵף תָּמִיד אֵלָיו יִתְבַּרַּךְ וּבְתוֹךְ כֵּן מִתְפַּלְלִין וְלוֹמְדִין וְעוֹשִׂין מִצְוֹת [וּבְאֵמַת לִפִּי גְדֹלְתוֹ יִתְבַּרַּךְ כָּל אֵלוֹ הַעֲבוּדוֹת אֵינָם כְּלוּם רַק הַכֹּל הוּא בְּדֶרֶךְ "כְּאֵלוֹ" פִּי הַכֹּל הוּא כְּמוֹ שְׂחֹק בְּעֵלְמָא כְּנִגְדַּ גְדֹלְתוֹ יִתְבַּרַּךְ]

All the Torah and Mitzvot should be understand as a performance “as though” with the echo of the comedy in the story. Only love desire and longing are tools in the service of the divine. The rational mind, logic and *daas* are incapable of meaning in religious life.

The notion of *kivyachol*, “as though” has a long history going back to Midrash and Aggadah when attempting to describe anthropomorphisms and then qualify them in the face of the rational philosophical mind. Rabbi Nachman however picks up on these tropes and makes them the cornerstone of his theology. He does it through the complexity of the story tale.

Michael Fishbane has explored the usage of the technical term “*kivyachol*” in Rabbinic Literature. This is the translation of the traditional Hebrew phrase, *kivyachol* which is customarily attached to such blatant anthropomorphic language to indicate that it should not be taken simply at face value. It opens the door to mythical language and paradoxical language where the divine and human can converse on equal terms.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Michael Fishbane, “The Holy One Sits and Roars’: Mythopoesis and the Midrashic Imagination,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991): 1-21.

And as to serving Hashem – I do not know who can say that he serves Hashem in accordance with the greatness of the Creator, may He be blessed. If someone knows a little of God's greatness, [...], I do not know how he can say that he will serve God, may He be blessed. And no angel or *seraph* can claim that it can serve God, may He be blessed.

But the main thing is the desire that one's desire be strong and powerful constantly to come close to God, [...] And although everyone wants and desires to serve God, nevertheless, not all desires are equal, and there are many differentiations within desire. Even in one person himself, at every instant and moment there are great differences between his desires.

And it is axiomatic that the principal element is the desire and longings – i.e., that a person should long constantly for God, [...]. And in the midst of that, we pray and learn and do mitzvot, (although in truth, taking into account God's greatness, [...], all of these types of service are nothing; rather, everything is in the way of 'as if,' because everything is like a simple joke in comparison to God's greatness, may He be blessed – in Yiddish, *klammersht*).<sup>162</sup>

The “joke” is the impossibility of our human worship even affecting God who in His greatness needs nothing and can be affected by nothing in this world. “*klameshrt*” as comedy or better “farce” describes the tone of the nihilism being evoked here. “as if” we could possibly affect the divine with our Torah and Mitzvot!

But philosophically it was Fackenheim who used the trope of *kivyachol* to express the “*as ifness*” that fits Rebbe Nachman’s implied theology the best.

In 1952 Emil Fackenheim addressed the paradox inherent in the notion that “God is infinite and yet directly related to each finite person.” The rabbis use metaphors, he writes, “to describe a relation which cannot be termed in any terms other than symbolic.” Our midrash is quoted to

show that the rabbis “in their stress on human responsibility ... even make the omnipotent God dependent on impotent man.”

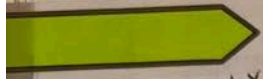
He stresses the use of the midrashic term *kivyachol*, “as it were.” Without it the paradox of God’s intimacy and infinity would be ruptured and become a contradiction. Taken without the theological reservation “as it were,” “a God needing witnesses in order to be God would possess intimacy but lack infinity.”

Steve Katz puts it more stridently and uses the term to intersect between theology/ontology and psychology/wish fulfillment/atheism:

*In the performance of t’fillah, not all the time because that would be the ideal, but occasionally, one feels that one is in the presence – a transcendental presence – of one’s maker, of one’s keeper. There is a profound feeling of reciprocity, a sense of intimacy that comes in the performance of certain mitzvot, sometimes on Shabbat, sometimes Tom Kippur [sic!], but especially in t’fillah, on different occasions. It means something. ... It’s interactive, and the person with whom one is interacting is, ***kivyachol [as it were]***, the divine person. The ultimate presence is interested and engaged. It’s not just listening like some psychoanalyst who just listens but has, in effect, no personal involvement. It’s someone who is deeply, genuinely interested and reciprocates that interest.*

# מעשה ו ממלך ענו

A



ל"ח x ר"ח  
25/20

Know

מעשה במלך אחד והיה לו חכם. אמר המלך להחכם: באשר שיש מלך שחותם עצמו שהוא גבור גדול ואיש אמת וענו. והנה גבור, אני יודע שהוא גבור, מחמת שסביב מדינתו הולך הים, ועל הים עומדים חיל על ספינות עם הורמאטים (א) ואינם מניחים להתקרב. ולפנים מן הים יש, מקום שטובעין בו (שקורין "זומפ") גדול סביב המדינה שאין שם כראם שביל קטן שאינו יכול לילך שם כראם אדם אחד וגם שם עומדים הורמאטים, וכשיבוא אחד להלחם, מורים עם ההורמאטים. ואי אפשר להתקרב לשם. אך מה שחותם עצמו איש אמת וענו, זה איני יודע, ואני רוצה שתביא אלי הפאטרעט (ב) של אותו המלך, כי יש להמלך כל הפאטרעטין של כל המלכים, והפאטרעט שלו לא נמצא אצל שום מלך כי הוא נסתר מבני אדם, כי הוא יושב תחת כלה, והוא רחוק מבני מדינתו.

Doubt Knew

Know

הלך החכם אל המדינה. אמר החכם בדעתו שצריך לו לידע מהות המדינה. ועל ידי מה ידע המהות של המדינה, על ידי הקאטאוויש של המדינה, הינו עניני צחוק (שקורין "קאטאוויש"). [כי כשצריכים לידע דבר, צריכים לידע הקאטאוויש של אותו הדבר, כי יש כמה מיני קאטאוויש: יש אחד שמכון באמת להזיק לחברו בדבריו

Comedy

(א) תוחים. (ב) דמות דיוקנו.



# מעשיות

מעשה ו

# ספורי

סד

וכשחברו מקפיד עליו, אומר לו: אני מצחק, כמו שכתוב (ג): כמתלהלה  
 וכו'. ואמר: הלא מצחק אני. וכן יש אחד שמתכונן בדרך צחוק  
 ואף-על-פי-כן חברו נזוק על-ידי דבריו. וכן יש כמה מיני קאטאוויש.  
 ויש בכל המדינות מדינה שכוללת כל המדינות, ובאותה המדינה יש  
 עיר אחת שכוללת כל העירות של כל המדינה שכוללת כל המדינות.  
 ובאותה העיר יש בית אחד, שכוללת כל הבתים של כל העיר,  
 שכוללת כל העירות של המדינה, שכוללת כל המדינות. ושם יש  
 אדם שכלול מכל הבית וכו'. ושם יש אחד שעושה כל הליצנות  
 והקאטאוויש של המדינה. ולקח החכם עמו ממון רב והלך לשם  
 וראה שעושים כמה מיני ליצנות וצחוק, והבין בהקאטאוויש, שהמדינה  
 בלה מלאה שקרים מתחלה ועד סוף, כי ראה שעושים צחוק, איך  
 מאנים ומטעים בני-אדם במשא ומתן ואיך הוא בא לדון  
 בהמאניסטרטאט (ד) ושם בלו שקר ומקבלין שחד. והולך להסאנד (ה)  
 הגבוה יותר, וגם שם בלו שקר, והיו עושים בדרך צחוק אן-שטעלין (ו)  
 מכל הדברים הללו. והבין החכם באותו הצחוק שהמדינה בלה מלאה  
 שקרים ורמאות ואין בה שום אמת, והלך ונשא ונתן בהמדינה.  
 והניח עצמו להונות אותו בהמשא ומתן. והלך לדון לפני הערכאות,  
 והם בלם מלאים שקר ושחדים. וכיום זה נתן להם שחד, למחר לא  
 הכירוהו. והלך לערכאות גבוה יותר, וגם שם בלו שקר עד שבא  
 לפני הסאנאט (ז), וגם הם מלאים שקר ושחדים, עד שבא אל המלך  
 בעצמו. וכשבא אל המלך, ענה ואמר: על מי אתה מלך, שהמדינה  
 מלאה שקרים בלה מתחלה ועד סוף ואין בה שום אמת. והתחיל

Structure  
 Rings  
 within  
 rings  
 Arch  
 Corridor  
 in  
 Center

Higher  
 levels  
 admin  
 ↓  
 Senate  
 ↓  
 Supreme  
 Court  
 ↓  
 King

C

KING SCENE

(ג) משלי כו, יח. (ד) בית משפט עירוני. (ה) בית משפט ממשלתי. (ו) מראים עצמם רק לפני. (ז) בית  
 השופטים הזקנים המלכותי.

# ספורי

ממלך ענו

## מעשיות

סה

not  
ner to  
train  
listen

לספר כל השקרים של המדינה. וכשהמלך שמע דבריו, הרבין אזניו  
אצל הוילון לשמע דבריו, כי היה תמוה להמלך שימצא איש שידע  
מכל השקרים של המדינה. והשריי-מלוכה ששמעו דבריו היו כועסים  
עליו מאד, והוא היה מספר והולך השקרים של המדינה. ענה ואמר,

החכם הנ"ל: והיה ראוי לומר שגם המלך כמותם, שהוא אוהב שקר  
כמו המדינה. אך מזה אני רואה איך אתה איש אמת, ובשביל זה

sure  
we  
State

אתה רחוק מהם מחמת שאין אתה יכול לסבל השקר של המדינה.  
והתחיל לשבח המלך מאד מאד, והמלך מחמת שהיה ענו מאד

Praise

ובמקום גדלתו שם ענותנותו. כי כן דרך הענו, שבכל מה שמשבחין  
ומגדלין אותו יותר נעשה קטן וענו יותר ומחמת גדל השבח של  
החכם ששבח וגדל את המלך בא המלך בעניויות וקטנות מאד עד  
שנעשה אין ממש. ולא היה יכול להתאפק והשליך את הוילון לראות  
את אותו החכם, מי הוא זה שהוא יודע ומבין כל זאת, ונתגלה  
פניו. וראה אותו החכם, והביא הפאטרעט שלו אל המלך:

city

דרכי ציון אבלות (ח): ציון היא בחינת הציונים של כל המדינות שכלם  
נתועדים לשם, כמו שכתוב (ט): וראה אדם וכנה אצלו ציון:

וזו ח"ה ציון קרית מ'ועדנו (י) ראשי-תבות מצח"ק, ששם היו נתועדים  
כל הציונים, ומי שהיה צריך לידע אם לעשות הדבר או המשא ומתן,  
היה יודע שם: יהי רצון שיבנה במהרה בימינו, אמן:

ראה והבן והבט אתה המעין עד היכן הדברים מגיעים. אשרי המחכה  
וניגע לידע ולהשיג מעט מסודות המעשיות הללו, אשר לא נשמעו  
באלה מימים קדמונים:

(ח) איכה א, ד. ט) יחזקאל לט, טו. י) ישעיה לג, כ.

10  
וְדַע שֶׁכָּל אֱלוֹ הַפְּסוּקִים וְהַרְמְזִים הַמוֹכְבָּאִים אַחַר קִצְתַּת הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת הֵם רַק רְמְזִים  
וְגַלּוּי מַלְתָּא בְּעֵלְמָא, לְמַעַן יִדְעוּ כִּי לֹא דְבַר רַק הוּא חֶסֶם וְשָׁלוֹם. וְכֹאשֶׁר  
נִשְׁמַע מִפִּי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּפִרוּשׁ שְׁאָמַר שֶׁהוּא מְגַלֶּה אֵיזָה רְמְזִים בְּעֵלְמָא בְּאֵיזָה  
פְּסוּקִים הַמְרְמְזִים לְסוּד הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת לְמַעַן דַּעַת שְׁאִינוּ מְדַבְּרֵי חֶסֶם וְשָׁלוֹם דְּבָרִים  
בְּמַלִּים. אֲבָל סוּד הַמַּעֲשִׂיּוֹת בְּעֵצָם רְחוּק מִדַּעְתֵּנוּ וְעֵמֶק עֵמֶק מִי יִמְצְאוּנוּ: