

# Why Uman?



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Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld Z'tl (a gadol of the previous generation, who used to have a chevruta with the Lubabitcher Rebbe and was one of four Rabbanim that R. Feinstein Z'tl would consult before his major Halachic rulings), said *“There is nothing more important for a person to do in this lifetime than to go to the kever of Rabbi Nachman in Uman. There is nothing a person can do or achieve in this world which can affect the past and future of his Neshama as visiting R. Nachman’s grave.”*

### **What did Rabbi Nachman say about it?**

Rabbi Nachman took an oath in front of two kosher witnesses and said *“whoever comes to my gravesite, recites the Tikkun Klali and gives a peruta (small coin) to charity, I will take that person out of Gehinnom”*. This refers not only to the Gehinnom we face in the world to come, but also the Gehinnom which we struggle with in this world.

### **Not for all the money in the world...**

A story is told of Rabbi Shmuel Shapira (one of the leading Rabbis of previous generations) who once met with Rabbi Shmuel Horowitz. Rav Horowitz had successfully managed to get to the gravesite of Rabbi Nachman, which was very hard to reach in those days, as Ukraine was at that time behind the Russian ‘iron curtain’. Rabbi Shapira requested from Rabbi Horowitz that he sell to him just one of the times Rav Horowitz had visited the grave of Rav Nachman. In return,

Rav Shapira offered to pay him with a great spiritual gain from his own mitzvot.

“Of course,” Rabbi Horowitz explained, “I assume we’re not talking about one of my visits to Rabbi Nachman’s grave on Rosh Hashana, “there is no sum in the entire world that I would sell one Rosh Hashana. However, for one visit to the kever on a normal weekday, let me hear what you have to offer?”

Rabbi Shmuel Shapira replied that in return for receiving the merit of one visit to Rav Nachman’s grave, he would give to Rav Shapira, written on signed document, a transfer of all of the mitzvot that he had ever done in his entire life until that day and all those mitzvot he would do for the rest of his life and, in addition, all of his Olam Haba!”

All those present at the time trembled when they heard this. The Olam Haba of Rav Shmuel Shapira! of whom the Admor of Gur testified that two thirds of the world stood in the merit of his (R. Shmuel Shapira’s) Shmirat Enayim!

When he saw that Rav Horowitz was wavering, Rav Shmuel Shapira continued, “and not only all of my mitzvot and all of my Olam Haba, but I also agree to take on my own responsibility all of your aveirot, and all the aveirot of your descendants too. All this, for just one visit to the kever of Rabbi Nachman.”

Rav Horowitz stepped backwards and cried out, “no, no. I am fooling myself. I am not prepared to sell for anything in this

world, for any price which you could offer me, such a great thing as this.”

### **Can Rabbi Nachman really pull me out of Gehinnom?**

A person might think that Rav Nachman’s promise to pull him out of Gehinnom is simply a ‘turn of phrase’ or ‘mashal’ (parable) for some spiritual teaching, but this is not correct. Rabbi Nachman was very clear in his words and he knew the severity of making a false oath.

In fact, the concept of pulling someone out of Gehinnom is not new. It is explicitly written about in the Gemara (Chagigah, 15b). There, Rabbi Yochanan explains to the Rabbis that when he dies he will go into Gehinnom and pull out Acher (the holy sage Elisha Ben Abuya, who had become a heretic after entering the ‘Pardes’ with R. Akiva). “Who will stop me if I take him out by the hand?” R. Yochanan explains. When Rav Yochanan subsequently passes away, the Gemara testifies that the smoke which had until that point emitted from Acher’s grave stopped. They then said in eulogy to R. Yochanan, “even the watchman at the entrance [to Gehinnom] could not stop you, Rabbenu.”

In the World to Come, the world of truth, the Zaddikim are in charge of the angels. Fortunate is a person indeed who binds themselves to the true Zaddikim whilst he is in this world, and who will then merit their protection in the next.

## **Saved from the Heavenly tribunal...**

There are a number of occurrences of people who, after have been to Uman, subsequently suffer a clinical death, eg following road traffic accidents (I'm aware, bli neder, of at least three such occurrences). At the Heavenly Tribunal, where all looked very black and onerous, on each occasion, Rabbi Nachman walked in and simply took the person out of the Court Room. No one stopped him. "Leave him," R. Nachman is quoted as saying, "he is one of mine". These individuals then returned back to life, and subsequently (and not surprisingly) made complete teshuva.

One such story was told by a man who came to Uman on Rosh Hashana just for the 'party'. He never once went into the Kever, and his only connection to Rabbi Nachman was that as he was getting into the taxi to leave Uman, he turned towards the Kever and said "see you later Rabbi!". He later said that was what had saved him.

All the more so, one who tries to bind himself to the Tzaddik by learning his teachings and following his advice. For such a person, Rabbenu promises to rectify his Neshama from its root in Adam HaRishon all the way to its final gilgul (reincarnation) in Yemot HaMashiach.

## **Hitbodedut**

Rabbi Nachman writes that the practice of Hitbodedut (personal prayer) surpasses all other forms of avodat Hashem. It is the greatest expression of our own individual, personal service of Hashem.

Many people have a built-in resistance to talking to G-d. They say that they're too busy, or they don't know what to say, they feel bored, frustrated or stupid. Dr Zev Ballen, an eminent psychologist, writes in his new book *Emuna Coaching*, that whatever the excuse, our resistance to talking to G-d is actually rooted in a fear of finding ourselves and not liking what we find.

However, talking to G-d is not at all difficult. Even two words (or just one word – “HASHEM!”) count as an act of personal prayer. Once a person gets used to the idea, he can truly rectify his soul simply through personal prayer each day. When a person speaks out the innermost thoughts and feelings of his heart to the Creator of the World, like he would speak to a good friend, Hashem guides that person along his own unique path to lead him to his ultimate soul correction.

There's no better place to practice personal prayer than at the Kever of a Tzaddik, and nowhere more so than the Tzaddik that introduced the practice back into Judaism. “Let me teach you a new way which is really an old way”, Rabbi Nachman explained to his students. After all, this was the

original form of Tefilah practiced by all of our Avot and Gedolim throughout the ages.

### **What do I say in Hitbodedut?**

The following are suggestions, as each person's personal prayers are really a unique expression of his own Neshama.

- **Thank You:** it is very good to thank Hashem for all the kindnesses he does for us every moment of every day. From our health, to our parnassa, to our wonderful family, we truly have a lot to be very grateful for. It is very good for us to tell Hashem, personally, and at length, how grateful we are.
- **Teshuva:** it's very beneficial to try to do Teshuva at the grave of a Talmid Chacham. Rabbi Nachman writes in Likutei Moharan (Lesson 4) that when a person confesses his sins before a Talmid Chacham, the letters which make up those sins are removed from being engraved on his bones and are used by the Talmid Chacham to build Hashem's malchut (kingship). Even though the Talmid Chacham has passed away from this world, as the Gemara testifies (*Hullin, 7b*) Tzaddikim are more powerful once they leave this world than when they were bound by the limitations of the physical body.
- **Bad Middot:** yes, we have bad middot. It's good to admit the truth. The Gemara teaches us (*Succah, 52b*) that without Hashem's help it is impossible for a person to

beat his Yetzer Hara. So in our personal prayer, we ask for Hashem's help to beat the Yetzer Hara. Whether its anger, sadness or in the case of men, lust for women (which R. Nachman, quoting the Zohar, explains is the main midda men came down to this world to fix), or any other of our bad middot, it is impossible to succeed without His help. Now is the perfect time to ask for help.

- **Our Spouse and Kids:** we all need Shalom Bayit, and prayer is the most effective way of achieving it. Likewise, we want the best for our kids. Personal prayer is a great opportunity to speak to Hashem about each one of them, spending time to ask Hashem for the specific needs of each individual child. If we don't yet have a spouse or children, we can join the many who found success simply by asking Hashem.
- **Spiritual and Material Requests:** perhaps not top of the list of conversation openers with Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu, but still far better to ask that all our success, spiritually and materially, comes from Him, and not from 'kochi v'ozi yadi' – the power and might of my own hand.

Remember that no prayer goes unanswered and Hashem cherishes every single word we manage to speak to Him. 'Karov Hashem le kol kora'av, le kol asher yekrautu b'emet' - Hashem is close to all those who call out to him with truth.

Try it and see. You may be amazed at the results.

### **What results can I expect from a visit to Rabbi Nachman?**

No two people are the same. No two Neshamot are the same. No two people's tasks in life or their tikkunim are the same. So too, the results of a visit to Rav Nachman are not the same for everyone.

Some people have amazing spiritual experiences at the Kever. Some see visions of Rabbi Nachman, some hear him speaking to them, others break down in tears. Still others can visit every year for 10 years, and feel nothing special at all.

One common phenomenon that may be experienced is that a person may apparently not feel any particular change in Uman, but when he gets back home...

We can illustrate this with a parable told by Rabbi Nachman. A man has a dream. In the dream he sees there is treasure under a certain bridge in Warsaw. He wakes up, ponders the dream momentarily and then ignores it. However, he keeps having the same dream each night. Eventually, he decides he has to go to Warsaw to see if the treasure really exists. He arrives there and finds the bridge which he dreamed about and starts to dig under it. A local policeman sees him and comes over, demanding an explanation as to why he is digging under this bridge. He realizes that he has no choice but to tell him the truth about his dream. The policeman hears the story and starts laughing. 'Stupid Jew' he tells him, "do you really believe in such nonsense?" "I myself had a dream last night that there was treasure under the floor of a

certain Jew living on Pushka Street in Breslov. Who believes such nonsense!”

The man, who lived on Pushka Street in Breslov, realized the policeman was talking about his house and rushes home. He looks under his own floor and finds there the treasure.

What’s the parable teaching us? Sometimes you have to travel to a distant place to realize that the treasure you seek is actually right there at home.

In the context of our journey to Uman, sometimes the results don’t start to show until we get back home.

But, if I left it just there, I may be guilty of withholding information from you. The truth is that our real treasure is getting closer to the Creator of the World. Growth, personal, spiritual growth is knowing and feeling that Hashem is part of our lives; that He is truly with us at every moment. But this level of awareness can come at a material price. You see it is difficult (not impossible, but difficult) to hold onto both this world and the World to Come. Sometimes we have to make a choice, surfing Facebook or surfing Shas? Advancing my career or advancing my Torah learning? Filling up my bank account or filling up my Neshama?

Sometimes, we make this choice without even realizing it – and I’m not talking about those times when we make the wrong choices by mistake, I’m talking about actually making the right choice, but not realizing it.

What do I mean? The following parable will explain.

There was once a man who made his living by collecting copper. Each day he would search around the marketplace looking for scraps of the metal to sell. One day he came across a pile of gold, just lying there, waiting to be taken. What did he do? He dropped the copper and ran to pick up the gold.

The above parable speaks about us. We may go around filling our lives with relatively lowly pursuits (such as pursuing the materiality of this world through seeking career or financial success). However, when we merit seeing the true value in this world, such as Torah, Mitzvot and getting close to Hashem, we then drop our previously held materialistic desires and just run after the truth.

This can happen on a conscious level (for example, a person sees clearly the truth of Hashem's holy Torah and makes a conscious decision to dedicate his life to fulfilling Hashem's will) but, it can also happen on an unconscious level. The Gemara says in a number of places (eg *Megillah, 3a*) "ee lo chazi, mazlei chazi", meaning "even if the person doesn't see, his soul sees".

In other words, we can arrive at the kever of a holy Tzaddik and come away without any apparent spiritual lift. However, our Neshama was, without us realizing it, on fire, dancing and singing in the holy light which radiated from the Tzadik. We've changed, but we haven't, at that point, become

consciously aware of it. Suddenly, however, the materiality of the world loses its appeal, and we start to have thoughts of sincere teshuva.

### **Chopping off the arms and legs of aveirot**

Rav Nachman said that he can 'chop off the arms and legs of our aveirot'. A story is told of a chasid who brought his secular friend to Uman. This friend had been known for his partying and womanising. He wasn't terribly interested in being in Uman and did not have a particularly inspiring experience there. However, not long after he returned to Israel, the secular friend called up the Chasid, and exclaimed to him "What have you done to me!?! I can't enjoy it any more!!" (meaning he had suddenly lost all his enjoyment from his partying).

Our journey in this world is only a temporary one. The delights and temptations which the Yetzer Hara places in front of us offer a temporary high, but an ultimate low, as we lose both this world and the World to Come as a result.

Conversely, there is no greater pleasure than forsaking the false gods of this world and choosing the real G-d. The reward then is life both in this world and the World to Come.

May Hashem give us the strength to run only after the truth.

Amen

