



That's Me!

1. Be Good to Yourself

To some life seems like a dream; yet to others a nightmare. Like it or not, life is what you make of it. Dear friend, if you feel that life hasn't been good to you, it's because you haven't been good to yourself. You are your own worst enemy! "But really, you don't understand, I'm stupid, I'm ugly, I'm a failure." Most of us don't like ourselves. We feel that we are the worst person, so we spend our lives proving it to ourselves and to others. Well, you're not. You're good stuff, really good stuff, but you don't know it or want to know it.

Perhaps the following satirical verses of Rabbi Nachman will shed some light on the silliness of your thinking: "Don't be like the large elephant or camel who won't kick back when the mouse

drags him by his nose; all because of nonsense that, of his strength he does not know". Caught yourself laughing? That's the point, you're laughing at yourself – at your own silly way of thinking. Face it, you don't know your true value so you don't appreciate yourself; instead, you knock yourself down and chisel away at your self-esteem until there is none. Ashamed to be seen, you retreat from society and become withdrawn, losing touch with others and with yourself. Unable to relate to the world, you become broken and depressed.

Is it a wonder that everything is going wrong in life? You fail, because you believe you are a failure. Caught in this vicious cycle how can you ever expect to succeed? How can you get ahead if you spend your days admiring this one's success and that one's achievements? Aren't you tired of waiting in line, yet never getting served? So much self-loathing; how much longer can you stand hating the person you are? As much as you try, you can't divorce yourself: you're here to stay, so you may as well enjoy the ride and start liking yourself.

Making a Start

“But, where do I begin? How do I start?” you ask. Simple: stop thinking about others and

comparing yourself to them. Give up trying to be who you're not and start focusing on yourself. Don't worry how far behind you are, you'll get there. You'll create your own success story in your own time. Just tune others out, because you need to, then take a hard look at yourself and say, "**That's me!**" Embrace these two very powerful words and make them your own. No more apologies, no more excuses, no more feeling small in the presence of others: "This is who I am, this is how I was created and I'm not prepared to change."

Recall what the Sages said, "Do not long for the tables of princes because your table is greater than theirs, your crown is larger than theirs." (*Avos*, Chap. 6) Precisely! The moment you start to look at yourself objectively – with all your strengths and weaknesses – and stop caring so much about others, your whole life will change.

All your troubles began when you started to believe that others are better, others have more, others have it easier. Naturally you desired to be like them, instead of being yourself. But you aren't, and can never be like anyone, but you. Now, after years spent trying to fit into other peoples' molds you're so bent out of shape that

you don't fit in anywhere. Out of the loop and feeling a vast inner emptiness what do you do?

You've made a career out of being who you're not. A veritable chameleon you walked like others, talked like others, acted, reacted and felt as they do; you don't know anything else, in fact, how can you? Early on in life, you chucked your real self off the highway and blindly followed the crowd. A quintessential people pleaser, you had no opinions; your wants and needs didn't matter; you avoided making choices; you were just going along for the ride. Easy, right? Wrong! You can't go on living in the shadow of others forever. At some point, your cover will be blown, leaving you exposed. There's no more hiding. You have to face what you've done, the emptiness you've created. Denial is done, awareness is at the gut level and it hurts. "Who am I? I'm so lost, I don't know what to do? How can I go on?"

Making Repairs

Stop, don't panic! What's done is done. Now the repair work must begin. Don't give up just yet; you still have your whole life ahead of you. Learn from your mistakes and go on. Some say "There are no second chances." Nonsense. As

long as you're alive and breathing you can change, but you have to want to and be willing.

So let's go! If you're feeling lost and can't find yourself, then start digging. Under the mounds of neglect and self-hate lies a forgotten soul full of passion and desire for life, waiting to be released. Climb through the rubble and clear the way for a long overdue self-awakening.

How? By repeating these words over and over: "This is me, this is who I am." Don't take this lightly; this is not a joke. You've been emotionally numb and disconnected for so long, you've forgotten what it feels like to feel. Naturally it's awkward having to confront the stranger standing before you. Get used to it! Faults and all, you are as special as you are unique. Work on accepting this.

In fact, even what you perceive as weaknesses are part of your makeup. You possess a blend of personality traits – both positive and negative – that's unique: there has never been anyone like you. If G-d created you like this, who are you to argue? The key is acceptance. This is how G-d fashioned you, and this is what you were meant to be. So go with it. Be yourself. Tell yourself; tell everyone, "**That's me!** I have my own unique mission in life to fulfill and I intend to do it."

The message is so liberating that if you internalize it, no one will ever be able to break you or stand in your way. It will unleash a fury of such powerful resolve that all the fear and timidity will wash away. You'll start coming through loud and clear. There's no need for petty jealousies anymore. I'm me and he's he. I'm a unique child of G-d, as he is, and we both mean something to G-d. My job is to focus on my own self development, just as G-d intended.

Are you getting the message? Which makes more sense?: To demolish your ego through fault-finding or to build up your self-esteem by discovering your good points? It's your choice: you can either remain in hiding – because it feels safe, or you can take the courageous step of confronting your true self. This is no simple task! But, on the other hand, no one is telling you to be bigger or better than you are, just to be real; be yourself.

This can begin to happen only when you accept the reality of G-d's control over everything; when you appreciate that nothing, large or small, happens without His say so, then you can appreciate yourself, as well. That will put you on the road to healthy growth and self-development.

By accepting G-d, you can finally accept yourself. Picture your name in lights; that's you and it should feel great! And it can be, if you will only coach yourself by repeating over and over again, "**That's me, that's me**, just as I was intended to be!"

2. Just Be Yourself

Are you the type of person who says yes, even though you want to say no? Do you find yourself telling people what they want to hear, instead of telling them what you think? Does the success of others intimidate you and make you feel worthless and incompetent? Now ask yourself, how long do you want to be locked into conformity, marching to the beat of everyone else's drummer, except your own? Stop trying to be like others, and just be yourself! It doesn't just sound easy – it is easy. You're different, but so is everyone else.

Rabbi Nachman said, "There is a special quality to every Jew, a point found in him that's not found in his friend." (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Chap. 34) Take for example, the case of the three Sages cited in the Talmud: Abba Omana, Abaye and Rava. Abba Omana, the blood letter,

received a greeting of peace every day from the heavenly court. Abaye received this same greeting every Friday, and Rava received it only once a year, on Yom Kippur. (*Taanis*, 21b)

Abaye was upset that Abba Omana, the blood letter received a daily greeting, while he only received it once a week. Eventually he was informed that he could not rival the extreme modesty of his colleague, who was careful not to gaze at female patients. In fact, Abba Omana took the extra precaution of creating separate examining rooms for men and women. And furthermore, he didn't charge a fee to the poor. Therefore, he was rewarded with a special daily acknowledgment from heaven.

Similarly, Rava was bothered that he only heard the heavenly call annually, which was even less than the other two. He received the reply, “[be satisfied,] It's sufficient that in your merit the whole city is sustained.”

“How is this relevant to me?”, you might ask. Just read the fine print; it's pointless to look at what others do or what they have. They have their unique destiny, and you have yours. So stop using others as your yardstick for success. Your inferiority complex is all in your head; somewhere, early in your development, you

received the damaging message that you're not good enough, and that others are better. The stigma stuck and you've spent a lifetime trying to erase who you are, by making yourself into somebody else. But it didn't work and never will. The faster you accept who you are and stop resisting, the closer you will be to restoring your sanity and making something of your life.

It's O.K. to Be Different

Just accept this: it's O.K. to be different, to be yourself. Don't negate your differences, on the contrary, celebrate them! Show the world who you are. Point out to them, "**That's me**; I'm special; I have something to offer the world that no one else does. I possess a uniqueness the likes of which the world has not seen nor will they ever see." Why feel bad, when you're as special as the next? People can say what they want, but your uniqueness is undeniable because no two people are alike. Rabbi Nachman said, "G-d does not make anything twice". (*Sichos Haran*, 54) No, there aren't two same peas in a pod, nor are there two exact birds of a feather; just you, me, he, she and everyone else out there with their own unique makeup and

inimitable style, as the Sages noted, “Whoever sees the masses of Israel should say, ‘Blessed be the Wise One of All Secrets [who fashioned them so that] their thinking is not the same, nor do their faces resemble one another.’” (*Berachos*, 58a) Imagine that! Like a rare gem you are totally original – so, why imitate others? They smirk and jeer at you; call you odd, strange or different; let them! You don’t have to apologize. Just answer them firmly with two resounding words: **“That’s me.”**

The “I” in You

What does “I” mean in the deeper sense? If all of reality is G-d, and G-d is reality, as is written, (*Devarim*, Chap. 32) “See now that I, I am He - and no god is with Me. I put to death and bring to life, I struck down and I will heal and there is no rescuer from My hand”, then what is “I?” Further it states, “Thus said G-d, King of Israel and its Redeemer, G-d, Master of Legions: I am the first and I am the last, and aside from Me there is no G-d.” (*Yeshaya*, Chap. 44).

So if G-d is everything how is it possible for an entity called “I” to exist? But the riddle is really not a riddle at all, because as Rabbi Nachman explained, the “I” actually refers to a person’s soul, his G-dly component. (*Likutei Moharan*,

Vol. 1, Chap. 22) Each one of us is rooted in G-d, so we are all a piece of the *Rock*. Furthermore, everyone is assigned their specific role in life; with a mission to fulfill that has far reaching impact in the upper realms. So, you may not feel special in the eyes of others, but you are to G-d. He has big plans and great expectations for you. Feeling better?! You *have* this knowledge, now use it. Next time others try to make you feel small and insignificant, come right out and say, "Too bad, **that's me.**" It's not so much what you mean to others, as much as what you mean to G-d that counts. That's the "me" part, the G-d part within you that's there forever. Don't get sidetracked by the opinions of others. Remember: to believe in G-d is to believe in your own self-worth, because you are literally a part of G-d.

We're Not All The Same

You've heard the expression, "It takes all types to make up the world." He's fast, that one is slow, she's always cheerful, he's somber and serious, that one never opens his mouth, he never shuts his, she's always irritable, he's patient and forbearing, she's smart, and yet he's stupid, he's poor and that other one is rich, he's handsome, the other homely; he's strong, but

his friend is weak, she gets along with everyone, but he's a recluse. We are all so different, yet there's room for everyone. So why are we still jealous of each other? No two people are created alike, as the Sages remarked, "By your name you were summoned, and by your station you were placed, no person can touch that which is designated for his friend, nor can one kingdom overlap the next by even a hairsbreadth." (*Yoma*, Chap. 38a) It's all predestined, so why fight it? Accept who you are and tell yourself and others, "**That's me.** This is how G-d created me, and I'm satisfied." Therein lies the secret to happiness and contentment.

Tackling Jealousy

As hard as it is to admit, you're not so bothered by what you lack, as much as what others have. Face it, your obsessive concern with others is making you so resentful that, you can't focus on making something of yourself. He's not better than you, you only think so! It's pure madness and a complete waste of time. Get a life, by reclaiming your own. How so? Through acceptance. When you accept G-d's control over your fate and the fate of the universe, you can accept yourself and whatever happens to you. But first, you have to make G-d a reality in your

life by speaking to Him. Make the effort to talk to Him every day, just as you would with a friend. Eventually you'll reach a comfort level; you'll build trust; intimacy will grow and the real "you" will emerge.

At the same time, you will become increasingly aware of G-d in your everyday life, as you sense His underlying control over all events. The truth becomes apparent: If all of reality is G-d and G-d is reality, then I must be a part of G-d. It follows that if I become more aware of G-d by talking to Him, then I also become more aware of myself. This idea is captured so succinctly by the verse, "I am prayer" (*Tehillim*, Chap. 109), meaning that I get to know my inner self through prayer simply by talking to G-d.

The converse is also true: When I distance myself from G-d, by ignoring Him, I lose touch with myself as well. When that happens you become prey to neurotic fears and panic, as did the terror-stricken Jews in the desert who, upon succumbing to doubt and skepticism cried out, "Is G-d amongst us or not?" (*Shemos*, Chap. 17)

Having a fallout with G-d, while at the same time experiencing a disconnect from the self, is perhaps the predicament alluded to in the verse, "I am in the midst of exile." (*Yechezkel*, Chap. 1)

That is, since G-d is missing from my life, I have become utterly lost and miserable.

The solution is obvious! Put G-d back into your life. Add Him to the equation and turn all the negatives into positives. Why go on hurting? Factor G-d back into the formula and the logic of it will make sense. Strengthen your connection to G-d by strengthening your faith in Him. (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol.1, Chap. 7) By accepting Him, you can accept yourself and all your painful circumstances. Train your eyes to always look upwards; notice G-d in everything, not what others do or have. That's them and this is me; nothing else matters, except G-d. See for yourself! Start talking to G-d today, and watch how your whole outlook on life will begin to improve.

4. Overcoming Our Insecurity

“Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never harm me!” Do you know why this adage has remained so popular over the ages? What is it about this simple ditty that we find so empowering? Let's face it, so many of us are insecure and are always looking over our

shoulder for approval. Slight remarks or wrong looks cut us down, instantly. We start hurting all over and feel unwanted, unloved or rejected. Yes, our egos are fragile, and we expect the world to “handle with care”. But they don’t and it’s unrealistic. So what can you do to avoid getting offended? Let the stinging remarks and insulting comments of others just slide off you. Sure it takes remarkable self-control. You’re angry and hurt, and you want to do something about it. Control yourself! Don’t answer back. Simply tell yourself, “What do I care what he thinks about me? This is who I am.”

Finding Our Way Back To G-d

Let’s go a step further; considering that your life mission is to find your way back to G-d, why do you allow yourself to get sidetracked by others? He has his path to follow and you have yours, so go with it! Of course, some personality clashes are inevitable, and friends may turn on you, as Rabbi Nachman said, “There isn’t a righteous individual who is not harassed by controversy and opponents.” (*Sefer Hamidos*, Chap. Heading *Tzaddik*, Cit. 136). Ignore it. Successful people don’t let others bring them

down. Make your contribution to the advancement of the Jewish People by doing your own thing, and avoid letting others block your way. Accept your fate by placing your trust in G-d's fair, yet compassionate, and just rule over the universe. Remember, He controls everything large and small and nothing occurs, without His say so.

Say Goodbye to Codependency

Relax! Loosen up and let go a bit. Go at your own pace, without letting others rush you. Be calm like the Simpleton from Rabbi Nachman's stories who was wont to say, "Why should I look at others? That's his thing and this is mine" (see *Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, Story #12, "The Sophisticate and the Simpleton"). The art of being yourself, however, is not so simple. After years of codependency, the insecure personality now has to think for himself, instead of sheepishly following others. He needs to reassure himself by repeatedly chanting, "Hey, **that's me**; I don't need others!" Great people know this, and therefore they don't cower before others.

Take for example Rebbi Chama Bar Chanina, who when challenged as to why he couldn't bring rain during a drought as did his colleague,

Rebbi Yehoshua Bar Levi, was unperturbed, and replied, “I am me, and he is the son of Levi!” (*Taanis*, 25a) He wasn’t fazed by the next guy, so why should you? Don’t be thrown off by others.

Look at yourself and don’t look at others, no matter what. Practice the art of detachment, by attaching yourself to G-d. This is the only way to get in touch with who you are, so you can be who you are. Remember, the only real life worth living is your own, and not somebody else’s.

5. Jealousy Is All In the Mind

Did you ever hear the common schoolyard brag, “My dad is bigger than your dad”? We may get older, but most of us haven’t outgrown the immature need to prove ourselves to others. Particularly when we’re down and out, everyone seems to have it easier or better. This is the time to recall what the Sages taught, “Do not desire the tables of princes because your table is greater than theirs, your crown is bigger than theirs” (*Avos*, Chap. 6). Life can certainly shake you up, but don’t let your self-confidence be shaken.

Ironically, it's when you're most down that you have be the most upbeat about yourself. If not, you'll start to envy the success of others, and once it takes hold of your psyche, it won't let go. Jealous emotions are like weeds that fester and grow, as the Sages warned, "Whoever has jealousy in his heart his bones rot". (*Shabbos*, 142b)

You've seen it for yourself. It could be your spouse, your co-worker, your child, a best friend or even yourself; when somebody is at their lowest point they lose perspective, and start imagining that everybody else is doing better than them. They seethe with rage and become chronic complainers. Easily offended, they target others with their jealous indignation. It becomes so hard to be around them, that you have no choice but to avoid them. This only serves to reinforce their role as the victim as they wallow in self-pity. Unfortunately, it's all in their head, but they can't see that.

Plant Your Own Garden

Rabbi Nachman taught that everyone possesses a unique trait that's not found in his friend (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Chap. 34), yet

who is immune to jealous feelings? The challenge is how to stop it from developing into an obsession that robs you of satisfaction in life. The answer is that you must doggedly focus on your good points. Think of these positive traits as tiny seeds that have the potential to grow and blossom into the finest bed of roses, if given the right attention and care.

So why not get the hoe and shovel and start sowing the seeds of your future success now? There's no time to waste. Cultivate your garden with patience and love; trust that at the right time fine and tall shoots will sprout forth that will make you proud. Weed out the tangling emotions of envy by tending to your own garden and not others. So many of us are too busy sticking our noses into someone else's backyard to notice that our own growth and development has stagnated. Don't lose focus in life.

Point to yourself and declare, "**This is me**, and these are my strong points, this is my table, this is my crown. This, and this alone, is what G-d expects from me, and me alone." This is the secret to triumphing in the battle of life.

Trust in Yourself; Not Others

From the moment you are born a rocky road path is carved and waiting for you to traverse. No one escapes the ups and downs in life. It doesn't matter who we are, sadness, grief, disappointment, shame, betrayal, loneliness, hopelessness, disillusionment will hit us at some point. During difficult times, you stand to lose a lot, but if you don't lose yourself, you're not losing what matters most. This comes from cultivating a strong sense of self, and not running scared to others. They can't even save themselves, so why fool yourself into thinking that they can save you?

Build up your sense of self by repeating over and over, "**That's me.**" Such a simple technique, yet so vitally self-preserving! King David warned, "Don't place your trust in nobles, in a [mere] mortal that can't save". (*Tehillim*, Chap. 146) Echoing this sentiment, Rabbi Nachman wrote, "There exist famous leaders who are impostors, that can't lead themselves, so how can they lead others?" (*Likutei Moharan*, Vol. 1, Chap. 61) Stop being so impressed by other peoples' qualities. Focus on yourself and what you have, and don't wait for handouts from others.

True wealth is defined as being satisfied with what you have, as the Sages taught, “Who is wealthy? He who is satisfied with his lot.” (*Avos*, Chap. 4) And who gave you what you have? Yes, G-d. So rejoice and be happy with what you have, because G-d takes pride in each and every one of us, without exception. Want to make it through life more easily, without complication? Take a hard look at yourself and say, “**That’s me**, just as He meant me to be, and really, that’s all that matters.”

6. Go at Your Own Pace

Do you recall the fable of *The Tortoise and the Hare*? Remember how the shrewd hare slyly challenges the plodding tortoise to a race he thought he would surely win? So what happens? While the over-confident hare bides his time, the tortoise steadily crawls to the finish line and wins, despite the last-minute dash of his competitor. Dear friend, can you relate?

Does the pressure to compete with society’s standards have you running in a mad dash to keep up? For suits, dresses and eyeglass frames you insist on nothing less than Armani; your

sons and daughters must attend only the finest yeshivas and seminaries; weddings and simchas must be party-planned marvels. Gasping for breath you cry, "Oy! How can I keep this up?"

So don't. Stop being the hare and learn not to care so much, like the unflappable tortoise. Move along calm and steady and don't let anyone rush you. They may yell, "You're too slow! You don't move. How do you expect to accomplish anything?" Let them. Let them flail and scream and get nervous, but not you. Remain steadfast and serene. Don't feel guilty. Tell them, "**That's me**. You're in a hurry, you can't sit still for a minute, that's your problem, not mine; leave me alone and let me live in peace. I'll do it my way."

That's precisely how G-d meant us to be; unique and different, without getting in each others' way, or to paraphrase the Simple One, "You do your thing and I'll do mine." (*Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, Story #9)

You Do Your Thing and I'll Do Mine

Can't stand the guy next to you? He's that slow-moving vehicle that's always getting on your nerves? Face it, it's not his issue, it's yours.

That's his nature, that's who he is, laid back and all. You can't expect everyone to be just like you. You can stomp and shout, "Move it, slow-poke," but it simply won't work. He'll just tell you, "Can't help it, **that's me**. And if you don't like it, you go your way and I'll go mine." Take for example our forefather, Yaakov, he didn't allow himself to be pushed around. When his brother, Esav, insisted on providing cavalry to escort him and his family for the remainder of the journey, he told him, "Not so fast", as the verse says, "Let my lord go ahead of his servant, I will make my way at my slow pace according to the pace of the drove before me and the gait of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." (*Bereishis*, Chap.33)

This lesson is fundamental for success in any area of life, particularly in how we mold our children. Every child is wired with an internal "speedometer" that determines his individual speed limit. This explains why we find in every class that there are the quick learners who grasp the material the first time, while others require more time absorb the knowledge. Sharper students, and sometimes even intolerant teachers, prone to impatience, will taunt a slow

learner with cutting remarks that can scar him for life, unless he's protected.

How can we empower children in our schools so that they don't feel dumb or guilty for being who they are? Simple, arm them with these two potent, self-affirming words: "**That's me.**" Every student can benefit from this formula and maximize his potential. Build up his ego with these two powerful words and watch criticisms and insults just slide off him. This kind of assertiveness training will transform him from a weak student to a strong one.

The bottom line is that everyone, not just students, need to learn to care for themselves by caring less about what others say or think. And it's these two words that encapsulate this profound message; it's says it all! Be yourself; be your own person, and disregard the pressure imagined or real, from others to be different. Be the captain of your own boat and your journey will be more pleasant. It's not easy watching others pass you by; getting promoted, striking it rich, getting the dates, having children, living it up, while your not. Never mind. Don't let jealousy consume you. Keep in mind the slow

and unassuming tortoise, crawling to the finish line. He's not impressed by others, and he stubbornly perseveres. If he could talk he would probably tell you, "**That's me**, and if they don't like it, it's their problem, not mine." He made it to the finish line, and so will you. Emerging triumphant everyone will ask, "How did you do it?" and you'll answer, "Simple, I did it my way!"

7. Make Your Own Choices

Did you ever watch a group of people head for the coat room? Notice how each person automatically reaches for his own coat? The racks may boast the most dazzling array of chic and elegant coats, yet each person takes what's his. Now why aren't you applying this basic lesson to your own life? Why are you allowing others to interfere with your life and dictate what you should do and how you should feel? "You're middle-aged and you're earning nothing, why didn't you listen and become a professional", they chide. "What, your thirty nine and still single, who's going to want you now? I told you should have married that divorcee", she jibes. "You only scored an 83, why didn't you get a 97 on the test like the Goldstein boy?" his dad

jabs. Everyone is ready to rush-in and add their two cents; they think they know it all and want to fix you.

Beware! No one is saving you and no one can save you; on the contrary, they'll only break you. Why? Because you let them. In our media-driven society, you've been conditioned to feel incomplete; that unless you have what others have, you're not good enough. Magazine ads, commercials, TV shows and movies promote this message to put you in a state of perpetual want and need. They raise the bar to unrealistic heights, set standards you can never reach, thereby setting you up for failure. No wonder you feel so broken and guilty about your life going nowhere. Now is the time to say you want out. No more looking what this one has or what that one accomplished. As a child of G-d, tell yourself that "I'm good enough as is, and no one can tell me otherwise."

You Count

Your outlook on life needs an overhaul; stop being so busy with others and start being busy with yourself and your future. In the equation in life, don't forget the "me" factor, which is precisely why the Mitzvah of Counting the Omer is directed to each and every one of us

personally. The verse states, “And you shall count for yourselves” (*Vayikra*, 23), on which the Sages expound, “That it should be a counting for every single one [of you].” (*Menachos*, 65b) How profoundly meaningful; every one of us must count in order to learn that *we* count! (*Likutei Halachos*, Passover, Law #9, Par. 22) My dear friend, if you’ve been looking for something to like about yourself, but can’t find it. If others seem wiser, nobler, and more put together than you, so that you feel, “why bother?”, then you’re missing the point. Sure, it’s great to be modest, but when you put others on a pedestal and put yourself down, that’s false pride. “I can’t settle for the minor leagues, it’s either the major leagues or I’m out.” Yes, it’s all or nothing, so you fold your arms and do nothing. If you can’t have what he has, you don’t want anything. Who’s running the world, you or G-d? Who told you that you must have what he has? Think about it. Doesn’t it make more sense that if what you have is from G-d, then that’s all you need to have? Again, that’s the underlying message of the command to “count for yourself.” If you want to escape the tyranny of living for others, start having a life of your own and mark each day as *your* day.

How To Stay on Track

This single-minded approach, adopted by Avraham the Patriarch, was the key to his success, as the Sages remarked on the verse, “[And] Avraham was one.” (*Yechezkel*, Chap. 33) Despite being surrounded by a society of skeptics and non-believers, Avraham conducted his quest for G-d as if he were the only one that existed in the world. He didn’t pay attention to anyone else’s opinions or objections; nothing could stop him.

Any seeker of truth must learn to trust their inner self; they must not let themselves be swayed or intimidated by their opponents or detractors no matter how seductive or convincing their arguments. Furthermore, in seeking your true path in life, even loved ones and well-meaning friends can throw you off course and discourage you. It’s hard to put in words and each person must decide for themselves “Am I being true to myself or am I allowing myself to be deceived?” What is certainly helpful is to combine both lessons, that of **“that’s me”**, and *“Avraham was one,”* as part of your life philosophy so that “This is who I am, I’m the only person in the world and that’s all that matters.”

Keeping It Simple

Perhaps nowhere has this profound point been so clearly illustrated as in Rabbi Nachman's satire "*The Sophisticate and the Simpleton*" (*Sippurei Maiysos*, Story #9). In short, a very non-skilled shoemaker is in the habit of making lopsided shoes with only three corners, yet he's extremely proud of his work. His wife, who is not so convinced, challenges him to explain why other shoemakers take three gold pieces for a pair of shoes, and he only takes one and a half. He innocently replies, "What does that have to do with me? That's his thing and this is mine, and furthermore, why speak of others?"

From this seemingly simple tale a profoundly paradoxical paradigm can be derived: sometimes perfect is not always perfect. Perfection is not always what G-d wants or demands. What G-d *does* want from us, as we see from the clumsy shoemaker, is simple and uncomplicated acceptance. You may not live in the nicest house, you may be poor or deprived, and have never stepped foot in a fine restaurant; you drive a beat-up jalopy, and you can't and may never will impress friends, so what? Furthermore, you may not pray with as much concentration and

devotion as you should, and others may outsmart you in learning and knowledge, but so what?

What really counts is that you're O.K. with it. You're happy with yourself and satisfied with what you can do and what you do. No one ruffles your feathers, and they couldn't if they tried. Now that's an achievement!

Sounds simple and easy? It's not. Perhaps the hardest part of life is keeping it simple, but the rewards are great. Go ask the simple shoemaker. In all his innocence, he rose to the high position as prime minister of the land. This is the secret behind the righteous, great people of all times, the *Tzaddikim*, who work tirelessly on themselves and don't look at others. Now, don't start getting all nervous and worried that you have to copy and be like them. That's not the point.

Work on just being happy being yourself, and don't try to be what you're not. And when you are, you won't need anything else. **"That's me"** means you have it all, so what else do you need?

