

Borchi Nafshi Meditation

12/30/98 (revised 4/22/99)

This meditation was first developed at the National Havurah Committee's New England Regional Retreat on Shabbat December 17, 1988, and was conducted during the morning services. That date was also the occasion of the first yahrzeit of my friend and teacher Hershel Jonah Matt, and the meditation was dedicated to his memory (see ... for explanation). At each subsequent New England retreat (with I believe only two exceptions) I have conducted a meditation based on this theme, and dedicated each to Hershel's memory.

I believe that I wrote out a text for the 1989 meditation, but I no longer have that text. I do however have a tape of that meditation, and of several later versions of that meditation. The text that follows is based on notes that I wrote before and after I did this meditation on December 17, 1998; these notes were addenda to a transcript outline made using the 1994 tape.

Nishmat Kol Chay Tevarech et Shimcha – The soul of every living being shall praise Your name.

The Shabbat morning prayer that begins with these words ends on a different note “Borchi nafshi et Adonai, v'chol k'rovai et shem kodsho” – My soul shall bless Adonai, and all my innermost being shall praise Your holy name. (Should it be “Let my soul ... let my ...”)

From “every soul praises Adonai” to “my soul praises Adonai”.

We begin our daily prayers by adding our voices to the symphony of praise. But, in order to move on to the Sh'ma and the Amida, each of us must also find his or her own individual voice of praise.

[transition from pesukei d'zimra to shacharit – how does creation's song of praise help us create our own song of praise?]

How do we make the transition from “nishmat kol chai” to “borchi nafshi”? How do we become spiritual soloists [“soul-oists”]? That is the theme of this guided meditation.

Breathing introduction.

[Your mind and your soul will wander to other thoughts and images . . .]

[Notice how easily your body settles into this pattern of slow and easy breathing. Feel the heaviness settling into your arms and legs, feel the relaxation settling into your whole body. Each breath is a gift from the source of all breath, from the source of all souls. As you inhale slowly and deeply, be aware of the gift, the gift of life, that you are receiving from your creator, and as you exhale slowly, express the gratitude for that gift. Continue breathing through the meditation, slowly, and evenly, and deeply.

[24 minutes from here to end -- from 1 to 285 on tape]

As we turn to the theme of this meditation, we remind ourselves of Psalm 148, which depicts the cosmic symphony offered by all of creation in praise of the Creator.

[Jacket should mention Psalm 148's position in Pesukei d'zimrah.]

Halleluyah. Offer praises to Adonai [revise].

Breathing in, and breathing out.

Praise comes to Adonai from the heavens,
Hallelu et Adonai min ha'sha'mayim, hallelu'hu
bamromim

Praise comes to Adonai from all of the heavenly hosts
Hallelu'hu shemesh ve'yare'ach, hallelu'hu kol
kochvei or

Praise God, you sun and moon, praise God you stars, you
heavenly sparks of light

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].

Praise comes to Adonai from the earth as well,
Hallelu et Adonai min ha'aretz
Everything on earth offers praise to Adonai
He'harim v'chol hag'va'ot, etz pri v'chol arazim
Mountains and hills, animals and birds,
Trees and flowers, wind and hail

*Ha'chayah ve'chol be'hay'ma, re'mes ve'tzipor
kannaf*

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].

*All of Your creations,
Your creations in heaven, Your creations on earth,
All together they sing Your praise
Ye'hallelu et shem Adonai
All together they praise Your Name.*

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].

*How do these creations praise Adonai?
What is their song of prayer?*

*Each creation, the psalmist tells us, praises God by doing
what it was meant to do.*

*Esh u'varad, sheleg ve'kitor, ru'ach se'a'ra, osah
devaro.*

*Fire and rain, snow and frost, strong winds,
each one "osah devaro", each one fulfilling God's
will.*

*Each doing what God created it to do, each doing what
God commanded it to do.*

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].

Each singing You a song of praise, halleluyah.

Let us take a moment and imagine the praise of some of these

creations.

Take a deep breath ...
and picture the sun,
 rising in the morning,
 traversing the heavens,
 bestowing its energy – its light, its warmth – to make
things grow,
 bringing brightness and beauty into our lives,
 and setting in the evening

As it proceeds through the heavens, it sends its song of
praise to the source of all energy, to the source of all beauty.

 Se'may'chim be'tze'tam, ve'sasim be'vo'am, osim
 be'emah, r'tzon konam

As the sun rises, as the sun sets, it rushes to obey Your
will with joy and gladness,
 singing You a song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].
Each singing You a song of praise ... halleluyah.

Take a deep breath ...
and picture the trees,
 lifeless in winter,
 sending forth buds in the spring,
 rushing to become full and green in the summer,
 joyfully creating a multicolor display of praise in the fall,
 as their cycle comes to end.
They display the beauty and variety of Your world,

*celebrating the cycles of Your universe,
fulfilling Your command to grow,
singing You a song of praise ... halleluyah.*

*Breathing in, and breathing out [2].
Each singing You a song of praise ... halleluyah.*

*Take a deep breath
and picture ...*

*the birds as they sing,
the wind as it howls,
the ice as it glistens,
the leaves as they fall,
the waves as they break on the sand
with each act they fulfill Your will
with each act they sing You a song of praise ... halleluyah*

*Each of Your creations sings to You:
“You have created us, Adonai, and we praise You by doing
what You created us to do.”*

*Breathing in and breathing out [2].
Each singing You a song of praise ... halleluyah.*

*As with the rest of creation, so with us also. You have
created us, Adonai, and we praise You by doing what You
meant us to do.*

*But there is a difference
they praise You as a matter of course,*

our [stress] song of praise is a song that we choose
[stress] to sing.

And it must be that way – for the automatic [review] praise
of God's other creations is inadequate.

Ho'do al eretz ve'shamayim.

God's glory transcends the praises offered by the heavens
and by the earth.

And so, Adonai, You have given us
the ability to praise You
and the freedom to choose to do so
together with all those
who wish to draw near to You ...
halleluyah.

Tehilla l'chol hasidav, liv'nai yisrael am k'rovo ... halleluyah.

Breathing in and breathing out [2].

As with the rest of creation, so too with each of us ...
individually.

You have created me, Adonai, and I praise You by choosing to
do what You meant me to do.

You created me a human being, in Your image, and
when my thoughts, speech, and deeds reflect the divine image,
I sing to You my song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah. [breath out
on "ha"]

You have given me the ability to feel and to care, and when my thoughts and actions are dedicated to helping other people, I offer You my song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

You have taught me to pursue justice and to be merciful, and when I strive for justice, when I temper my judgment of others with mercy, I sing to You a song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

You have taught me how to live through Your gift of the Torah, and when I live in accordance with its teachings, I offer You my song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

You have created me a unique person, and when I fulfill that uniqueness, I sing to You my very own song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

You breathe into me each moment the breath of life, and when I am aware of Your breath and return it to You in thanksgiving and gratitude, I offer You my song of praise ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

Take another deep breath and imagine

*Breathing in, you sense God's presence, breathing out, you sing
God's praise ... halleluyah.*

*With every breath that I take, I become aware of Your
presence.*

With every breath I return, I sing your praise.

Kol ha'neshama te'hallel yah, halleluyah.

May every breath be a song of praise to You ... halleluyah.

Breathing in, and breathing out ... halleluyah.

*Breathing in, sense God's presence, breathing out, sing God's
praise ... halleluyah.*

*Imagine your breath reaching deep inside of you,
enlivening each part of your being.*

*Imagine your breath reaching deep inside of you,
activating each part of your body to join in your song of
praise.*

*Breathing in, sense God's presence, breathing out, sing God's
praise ... halleluyah.*

Kol peh le'chah yodeh

Every mouth shall give You praise.

My mouth will give You praise.

Kol lashon le'chah tishava

Every tongue shall vow loyalty to You.

My tongue will vow loyalty to You.

Kol berech le'chah tichra

Every knee shall bend before You.

My knee will bend before You.

Kol komah le'fanechah tish'ta'chaveh

Every head shall bow down to You.

My head will bow down to You.

Breathing in, and breathing out [2].

Let your breath go deeper and deeper, and let your song come from deeper and deeper inside yourself.

Breathing in, sense God's presence, breathing out, sing God's praise ... halleluyah.

Kol le'vavot yi'ra'u'chah

Every heart shall revere You.

My heart will revere You.

Kol kerev u'ch'layot yi'zamru lishmechah

Every fiber of my being shall sing Your praise.

Kol atzmotai to'marnah – Adonai, mi kamochah

All my bones shall proclaim "Who is like You!"

Borchi nafshi et adonai

My soul shall bless Adonai

Vechol k'rovai et shem kodsho

And all my innermost being shall bless Your holy name.

Borchi Nafshi – chant three times, pause for 15 seconds,

My soul shall bless You Adonai

*And all my innermost being, every part of me shall
praise Your holy name.*

Borchi nafshi et Adonai, v'chol k'rovai et shem kodsho.

Borchi nafshi et Adonai, v'chol k'rovai et shem kodsho.

Borchi nafshi et Adonai, v'chol k'rovai et shem kodsho.

My soul shall bless You Adonai

*And all my innermost being, every part of me shall
praise Your holy name.*

*Breathing in, sense God's presence, breathing out, sing God's
praise ... halleluyah.*