

Rabbi David Wolpe's

Off The Pulpit

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A Turkey Under The Table?

Rabbi Nahman of Btazlav once told of a prince who suffered from delusions and thought he was a turkey. A wise man cured him by emulating his behavior: crawling under the table, pecking at his food and behaving just like a turkey. Gradually, he began to ask the Prince — "Can't a turkey wear a shirt?" And, "Can't a turkey eat with utensils?" In that way the wise man gradually brought the prince back to acknowledging his humanity.

As with all of Rabbi Nahman's renowned tales, this has been interpreted in many ways, both theological and existential. But we should not overlook the tremendous psychological insight it offers. The

renowned humanist psychologist R.D. Laing once behaved very much like the wise man in Rabbi Nahman's story. When faced with a naked schizophrenic woman rocking silently to and fro in a padded cell, Laing took off his own clothes and sat next to her, rocking to the same rhythm until she spoke for the first time in months.

Everyone needs another willing to enter her world. When we mirror each other, we acknowledge that reality takes many forms, and we reassure the sufferer that he is not alone.

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Rabbi Wolpe's new book *David: The Divided Heart* is available now.