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The Sorrow of Wood Morton Marcus

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Morton Marcus

THE SORROW OF WOOD

It is recorded that on his travels Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav was unable to sleep one night when he stayed in a cabin made of new logs. He was kept awake by moanings everywhere around him, which none of his companions could hear. "It was the pain of the trees which had been cut down to build the house," he explained the next day. "Their grief surrounded me and I could not rest."

The Rabbi was moved by the sorrow of wood, a sorrow that ascends like sap through the trees, as it does through us, drawn upward from the earth until it returns to the light from the highest leaves.

For what has died and gone back into the earth rises through us and lives again. We are nourished from below by hidden springs that drain through the stones with endless wailings that few of us can hear, but through those laments we flourish and dance in the sunlit wind before we return as water to the buried stones.