

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

TO BLESS WITH FAINT CRITICISM

By Ozer Bergman

"These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel..." (Deuteronomy 1:1).

Rashi comments that because these are words of reproof, Moshe Rabbeinu lists the places where the Israelites had angered God by merely alluding to them.

Rabbi Akiva said it about 2,000 years ago and Rebbe Nachman repeated it about 200 years ago: "I'd be surprised if there's anyone in this generation who can give reproof" (*Erkhin*16b).

The purpose of reproof is not to vent anger or frustration, or to show the other person that you're smarter. It's certainly not for the sake of being holier-than-thou. Rebbe Nachman explains that the purpose of reproof is to bring out the beautiful fragrance within your fellow Jew.

Each of us has the potential to be either a very great *tzaddik* (saint) or a very great *rasha* (villain). We've done good deeds and bad that have developed and solidified our traits, good and bad. The right kind of correction is going to stir up and reinforce a person's good qualities, bring him to life, and help him be a better Jew. The wrong kind of reproof is going to have the opposite effects. If you open a bottle of perfume and move it about, the fragrance is quite enjoyable. On the other hand, if you empty out a diaper pail...

So, you have to be careful when speaking to people. You have to know what to say and how, and to whom you can say it. You have to know where and when. You also have to know when to remain silent, saying nothing at all or leaving certain things unsaid. You have to know how to judge others favorably, how to fulfill the Mishnah (*Avot* 4:1): "Don't degrade any person," no matter who. By judging a person favorably, you open up an "escape route" that enables him to give up his sins.

And you have to reprove yourself the same way. No matter how criminal your past (or present!) activities may be, don't judge yourself negatively. For in fact, you have no conception of how well you are doing. You don't know what incarnations you've lived through in the past, what you've gone through in *this* lifetime, and what power(s) your evil inclination has. So, all told, you might actually be a tremendous spiritual success despite all outward appearances.

"Don't degrade any person"—even yourself. Don't be so harsh with yourself that you lose hope and interest in *mitzvot*, because that's suicide. Your capacity to do the wrong things will grow. And then what will be? This is why *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) begins with correction of kindness. Moshe Rabbeinu taught us and teaches us that as much as we've angered God with our "golden calves," our "spies," and all our other sins (aka mistakes) large and small, God still loves us and has pity on us.

And what does God want from us? To fear Him—namely, to pray to Him (see Deuteronomy 10:11; Proverbs 31:30). The main "escape route" is to cry out from the depths of the heart, be what may. Never to despair, never to think that, God forbid, crying out doesn't help. Being who we are, we need a "Moshe Rabbeinu" to remind of us this. About this Rebbe Nachman writes:

"One needs to search and seek very much for such a guide and to become close to him... In fact, one needs very, very much to search and seek a genuine guide like this. One needs to request very much from God that he be worthy of coming close to a true guide."

With such a guide/teacher, one's faith can grow continuously, even to the extent that he can have perfect faith. When enough of us achieve that perfect faith, a new world will be ushered in, a world for which we have been waiting for nearly 2,000 years. May it come soon, speedily in our time. Amen!

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

(Based on *Likutey Moharan* II, 8)

SIDEPATH

"Receive every person with a cheerful face" (Avot 1:15).

Rabbi Ben Zion Apter used to relate a number of stories that he had heard from Rabbi Avraham b'Reb Nachman about the latter's comrade, Rabbi Aharon of Kiblitich. A devoted Breslover chassid, Reb Aharon was known for his extraordinary diligence in Torah study and for his cheerful demeanor, which was immediately apparent to anyone who saw him. Although beset with financial difficulties and other hardships, Reb Aharon always managed to remain happy, singing and dancing at the slightest excuse. Needless to say, his joy was contagious.

He once described how, after an especially lively dance, the Evil Urge had taunted him, "Aharon! You are the poorest man in town. You have all sorts of problems. Where did you find the joy to dance with such enthusiasm?"

"I borrowed it," he readily admitted. "I borrowed that dance from the better days ahead!" (based on *Oneg Shabbat, Hosafot*, p. 525).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

Introduction to Sefer Devarim (Book of Deuteronomy)

In *gematria*, the letters of the name *YeHoShUA* (יהושע, Joshua), plus five units for the five letters, equals 396. Similarly, the letters of the word *MiShNaH* (משנה), plus one unit for the word itself, equals 396.

Yehoshua signifies the Book of Deuteronomy, which is sometimes called *Mishnah Torah* since it repeats many of the laws of the Torah. The Book of Deuteronomy continually exhorts the Jews to strengthen themselves in God's service, not to slacken their devotions. This is the devotion of Yehoshua, the student, to instill into others the teachings of his master in order to arouse them to serve God.

Losing and Gaining the Holy Land

Parashat Devarim is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, since it speaks of

the rebuke Moshe gave the Jews for their blemished faith, which caused them to believe the spies and bemoan their entry into the Holy Land, creating the "day of weeping for generations." The next portion, *Parashat Va'etchanan*, is always read on the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av, since it speaks of God's Treasury of Unearned Gifts (see Rashi on Deuteronomy 3:23) through which God gives us the merit to enter the Holy Land (LH VIII, p. 157b).

1:1 These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel

Each Individual Can Find Himself in the Tzaddik's Words

When an exceedingly great tzaddik speaks, his words are apropos to all of Israel, and each individual can find himself in his words (RNW #290).

1:1 These are the words...on the east bank of the Jordan

Evil Must Be Defeated Before Good Can Prevail

The Land of Israel corresponds to holiness. The east bank of the Jordan River corresponds to *nogah*, a *kelipah* that contains both good and evil. Moshe rebuked the Jews while standing on the east bank of the Jordan River, before they crossed into the Holy Land, to teach them that they must first subdue the evil before bringing the good into the realm of holiness (LH III, p. 224a-448).

1:11 May He bless you as He has spoken to you

When Our Speech is Holy, We Draw Down God's Blessing

This phrase may also be read as "He will bless you as your speech is." God's blessing of the Jews takes effect in accordance with their speech (LM I, 34:3). The holier a person's speech, the more blessing he can draw down.

1:17 Do not show favoritism in judgment

We Do Not Have the Right or Ability to Judge Others

Only God knows how to judge each individual for his deeds, in the context of his intentions and circumstances. Therefore we must take

great care never to judge others, for we do not know everything there is to know about a person's reason for his deeds (LM II, 1:14).

1:21 See, God your Lord has placed the Land before you; go up and inherit

Nothing Stands in the Way of a Person's Desire

What should someone do if he desires to do a mitzvah, but can't? For example, he wants to travel to the Holy Land, but he can't find an available flight, or he lacks the funds, or it's a time of war, and so forth. The answer is that he must never give up the desire to do the mitzvah. If he remains steadfast, the opportunity will present itself (see LH II, p. 160).

1:22 You approached me

Always Seek Advice Before Acting

The spies did not ask Moshe for advice (see Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:23). This was their principal error. Before proceeding on a serious task, one should always ask advice from many people. And asking the advice of a tzaddik is considered the equivalent of consulting many people (LM I, 143).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

**2 — "Speak to the priests" (Leviticus 21:1)
(continued)**

7. It is not proper to think about receiving reward for anything, for all of our good deeds and all prayers are given to us by God. Therefore, even if a person occasionally merits some salvation and to draw a little bit closer [to holiness, etc.], he should not think that he merited this as a result of his own Torah study, prayers and good deeds. For everything is from God, and were it not for God's great kindness, he would already have drowned, God forbid, in what he would have drowned in, may God save us.

8. The essence of the evil inclination is the urge for sexual transgression. This is the primary source of spiritual pollution. Therefore, one must know that the main test for every person in this world is his struggle with this desire. Fortunate is he who merits to win the war!

9. The true tzaddik of the generation is associated with the concept of the "greater luminary." He shines to and illuminates prayer, which is the concept of the "lesser luminary."

**3 — "I myself saw this frog"
(Bava Batra 73b)**

1. Through holy song, a person raises up and elevates the Kingdom of Holiness and merits a position of authority. The opposite is also true. The cantors and singers of the Other Side [i.e., the forces of impurity] blemish the Kingdom of Holiness and prolong the exile. Because of them, people stumble and become ensnared like birds caught in a trap. Therefore, a person must be extremely careful not to listen to the song of a singer of the Other Side, whose intention in singing is not for the sake of Heaven at all, but rather for money, honor or self-aggrandizement. Hearing the singing of such a person is detrimental to one's service of God. Conversely, hearing the singing of a righteous, worthy person is good for one's service of God.

2. The remedy that enables a person not to be harmed by the voice of song of the Other Side is to study the Talmud at night.



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