

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

CAN YOU HANDLE THE DOWNS?

By Ozer Bergman

Let's review what we wrote last week about the *Omer*-offering. Yes, it's that important. The offering consisted of barley, an archetypical animal food. On the second day of Pesach, an *omer* (a measure equal to approximately 2 quarts/1.9 liter) of barley was waved in the six directions of space (up, down and to the four winds). We asked: Why wave barley? Why not wave wheat, human food? Here's an answer we didn't give last week. Barley, because it is animal food, represents animal-like thinking. For your average cow, nothing could be better than being put out to pasture or munching on fresh hay. That's what life is about—pampering the body. Animals don't think too much about the purpose of life and rarely spend time contemplating the kindness and greatness of the Creator.

Unfortunately, the same is true of some human beings most of the time, and all of us some of the time. When we sin,* it's because our brain has slipped down into animal mode. Bad enough if that's a result of our having consumed too much "barley." It's far worse when we make a foolish conscious decision to remove our human awareness in order to make like a monkey or do like a donkey.

But—THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS DESPAIR! When the Kohen waved the *Omer*-offering in the Beit HaMikdash, he was doing something extraordinary. His silent waving was sending a powerful message to every human being across the globe: THE WORLD IS FILLED WITH GOD'S GLORY! There is no place—physical location or spiritual situation—that is empty of God's presence. This is why "there is no such thing as despair." No matter how unsacred or anti-holy the place you find yourself, no matter how many unsacred or anti-holy decisions you've made in life (even just a few minutes ago), God is right there with you, filling that space with His glory.

And this is when a Jew's mettle is tested. Will he throw in the towel, accept his current debauched state, and continue moving away from God and His Torah? Or will he endure whatever comes his way in order to maintain his Jewish successes to date, and continue to yearn and cry out to God to allow him to come closer and closer still? A Jew who hides his face from God because of his failures not only will not succeed at being a good Jew, but will

deteriorate, God forbid. As a Jew, you always have to bear that in mind: It doesn't matter how filthy it is, God is here. I can and will come back.

This is why we have the *Omer*-count. We're human. We make mistakes. We let our physical side induce us into animal dumbness. So it is necessary to count, count and count some more, to ingrain into our brains and minds as deeply as possible that it is absolutely true that God's glory is present everywhere; that anyone can return to God no matter what type of spiritual contamination he has to overcome. You need to know this in your *kishkes* (guts) if you want to keep the Torah. Why?

Because when you see the Torah and study it, the angelic side of you gets excited by its beauty, its genius and its mystery. It wants to swallow *right now* everything the Torah has to offer. But you can't do it. It's impossible—and unhealthy—to zoom straight to the top of the mountain. The Torah's advice to those who want to purify themselves: Go slow, even very slow. It takes time to transform an ex-slave into a holy Yid. While that's happening, a lot is going to take place in your life, not all of it pleasant. That presents you with two types of challenge.

The first is to maintain self-control and not give into temptation. The second is to not become discouraged and give up if you stumble and fall. This is especially true if you've tried and tried and tried. Our animal-side is looking for an excuse to wiggle away from the Torah. "What's the use?" and "I'll never make it" are among its favorite excuses. Counting the *Omer*, remembering that God is present even in the most animal parts of life, undercuts those arguments and enables us to grow Jewishly.

This is why the mitzvah tells us, "Count for yourselves" (Leviticus 23:15). You have *your* Jewishness to attain. Don't let your setbacks discourage you. Don't let other people's successes discourage you. Just because they've already succeeded doesn't mean you never will. At a certain point, no amount of outside encouragement is going to help you. In your "career" as a Jew, you will be in situations where you and only you can provide the necessary encouragement to reach into yourself and keep on going in your quest to be the holiest Yid you can possibly be—and you will be. Amen.

* What is a sin? Doing something you know you shouldn't, or not doing something you know you should.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

(Based on *Likutey Halakhot*, Pesach 9:20–22)

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman once told of a well-known rebbe who would pray in his private room adjacent to the synagogue. Hearing sounds outside his door and thinking it to be his chassidim trying to catch a glimpse of their master's devotions, the rebbe prayed with great fervor and enthusiasm. Later he discovered that the sounds had been caused by a cat scratching at the door. "For nine years he prayed to a cat! God save us!" (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 25).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

16:7 He should take the two goats and stand them before God

Only God Can Show Us The Difference Between Truth and Falsehood

The mitzvah is to take two goats that are similar in age, height and appearance (*Yoma* 62a).

Notwithstanding the fact that they are identical, one goat is dedicated to God and one is dispatched to Azazel. In the same way, falsehood can make itself look like truth, and one might not be able to differentiate between them. Therefore the goats were drawn by lots: the Jews relied on God to reveal which goat was for holiness and which was for the Other Side. We, too, must rely on God to show us the difference between falsehood and truth (*LH IV*, p. 416).

16:16 The Tent of Meeting, which dwells with them even in the midst of their impurities

Words of Holiness Bind Us To God

[*HaShoKheiN* (השכן, which dwells) has the same root as *SheKHiNah* (שכינה, Divine Presence).] The *Shekhinah* remains with the Jews even when they are impure (Rashi).

Just as a mother always stays with her child and never forgets him, the *Shekhinah* stays with Her people. The *Shekhinah* corresponds to the *sefirah* of Malkhut and to speech. When a person verbally expresses his connection to

the Divine, he forms a bond with God that can never be severed. The words of holiness that he has spoken remain with him to remind him of his Source and inspire him to return to God. Even if he will later fall and sin, these words of holiness will help draw him out of his state of impurity (LM I, 78).

Thus, it is always good to speak to God, whenever and wherever we can. In times of trouble, these words strengthen us, reminding us of God's awesome greatness and ability to help us.

17:11 The soul of the body is in the blood

A Person Should Serve God With Every Drop Of His Blood

Speech comes from the *nefesh* (soul), which resides in the blood. One must serve God with every drop of blood inside him, turning his blood into words of Torah and prayer. In contrast, the desire to always win and argue stems from the blood which a person has not yet used to serve God (LM I, 75-B:4).

18:5 Observe My statutes and My laws, which a man should carry out and live by them

Do The Mitzvot As Best You Can

"Live by them"—not die by them (*Yoma* 85a).

One should *live* with the Torah and not feel suffocated by it. He should not seek extraneous devotions or unnecessary *halakhic* stringencies. Rather, he should enjoy doing the *mitzvot* as best as he can, and not seek to fulfill them according to every *halakhic* opinion. The greatest wisdom is not to be wise at all—just to serve God with simplicity and straightforwardness, since what God really wants is the heart (LM II, 44).

When he was young, Rebbe Nachman spent much time and effort observing the *mitzvot* according to the most stringent views. Afterwards, he realized that the proper way to serve God is to choose to observe one *mitzvah* with absolute stringency. As for the other *mitzvot*, one should fulfill them in accordance with the normative *halakhah* as presented in the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #235; see also *Crossing the Narrow Bridge*, chapter 1).

18:21 Do not allow any of your children to be passed to Molekh

Protect Your Children From Secular Wisdom

Molekh was an idol, an Ammonite god. The ritual called for a person's children to cross a platform between two fires (Rashi).

The worship of Molekh continues even today, as parents willingly expose their children to the fires of secular wisdom, depriving them of the study of Torah and the revelation of Godliness (see LH VII, p. 100).

19:2 Be holy

Being Holy Means Guarding The Covenant

Holiness may be found wherever there is a safeguard against immorality (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:6).

A person must guard his covenant. Should he fail to do so, he "will be counted among the immoral, the idolaters" (*Tikkuney Zohar* #56) (LM I, 36:end).

19:6 Anything left over on the third day must be burned in fire

Saying Blessings And Prayers With Concentration Assures Their Potency

If, when slaughtering a sacrifice, one plans to eat it beyond its permitted time period, that thought disqualifies it (Rashi).

This idea also applies to the blessings and prayers that a person recites. If he does not concentrate on them correctly, he renders them unfit (LM I, 37:5).

19:18 Love your friend as you love yourself; I am God

Accepting Suffering With Love

LeRei'AKha (לרעיך, your friend) may be read as *LeRa'AKha* (לרעך, your troubles). In other words, you should "love your troubles"—accept with love the suffering that comes your way.

Why? Because these troubles are *kamokha* (as yourself), which can also be translated as "according to how you are." All the suffering you experience is commensurate with your deeds.

Ani YHVH (I am God)—God's Name *YHVH* indicates His attribute of compassion. Despite your deeds, God treats you with compassion, and not according to what you deserve in light of absolute justice (LM I, 165).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

12 — "A song of praise of David" (Psalms 145:1) (continued)

4. There are many people who study a great deal of Torah and yet do not repent; to the contrary, they even oppose the *tzaddikim*. This is because they do not study the Torah for its own sake, but rather for the sake of gaining honor, or a rabbinical position, or status, or to be able to argue. Torah study such as this warps a person even more, since the nature of Torah is that "Tzaddikim will walk in them and sinners will stumble in them" (Hosea 14:10). Thus, the Oral Law that this person studies turns into words spoken against the *tzaddikim*—since he sees only a negative meaning in the Torah, as in, "sinners will stumble in them," [and since he himself is warped, he sees only] a warped meaning in the Torah.

5. When a person studies in holiness and in purity a legal decision or a Torah teaching originated by one of the *Tanna'im* (Mishnaic Sages) or some other *tzaddik*, a phenomenon termed "kissing" occurs. What happens is that the spirit of the *Tanna* cleaves together with the spirit of the person who is studying, and it is as if the person studying is "kissing" the *Tanna*. This bonding gives great pleasure to the *Tanna*, as our Sages, of blessed memory, said, "[When someone in this world studies the words of a deceased Torah scholar,] the latter's lips move in the grave" (*Yevamot* 97a).



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