

## IT'S ALL GOOD

By Ozer Bergman

"I am the Eternal-Lord, your God, Who took you out of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2).

A non-Jew came to Hillel to convert, but wanted to do it in a curious way. "Teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot." Hillel replied, "What you find disagreeable, don't do to a friend. The rest explains [what is disagreeable]. Go study [and know]" (*Shabbat* 31a).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that if you know that everything you live through happens for your benefit, then you are having a taste of the World to Come, you are living a quasi-utopian life. The key word here is *know*, which does not refer to an intellectual attainment, but to an awareness in the core of your being (see *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #217). The question is, why, after seven weeks of intense preparation to receive the holy Torah, does God introduce the Torah by introducing Himself? What information or awareness is He providing us? Haven't we already seen the miracles of the Exodus, the splitting of the sea, and then some more in the desert (e.g., the manna)?

Let me tell you a secret. Not a single holy Jewish *sefer* (book) talks about God. Not a one. They can't because God is infinite (maybe even greater than infinite, whatever that might mean), and we human beings are quite finite. What every *sefer* discusses is how God interacts with His creation. So God starts out by telling us, "I am Who I am, beyond human comprehension. But you know Me as *YHVH*, the Eternal-Lord, Who does kindness with the world. And you've seen Me in action as *Elokim*, that if need be, I can get rough. Either way, I am your God. I care about you. I took you out of physical and mental slavery—when your behavior, attitudes and aspirations were "Egyptian," antithetical to faith and decency—that's the proof."

So God is introducing to us the idea that He is *HaTov veHaMeitiv*, the Good and

Beneficent. In a world where a person can be rich and famous one day, destitute and forgotten the next; where the gods Buzz and Spin challenge the values of Honesty and Morality, we very much need to know that behind all the different things that happen and all the continuous changes that take place is One totally kind God. "Study My Torah to know Me! Keep My Torah properly to stay focused in order to rise above the transient, both pain and pleasure."

The non-Jew who wanted to learn the Torah while standing on one foot was certainly intelligent. After all, he came to convert! Knowing, or sensing, that the Jews received the Torah with a high degree of personal and communal unity, he understood that he, too, would have to be totally undivided in his acceptance of the Torah. It had to be "on one foot," with unshakeable resolve. Hillel replied in kind. "We humans are not God. We cannot constantly provide goodness and beneficence. But we can preserve the personal integrity and communal harmony that allow us to receive from God's goodness, if we learn the 'commentary' that instructs us how to not undermine the goodness of God's interaction with His world."

Rebbe Nachman recommends a way of studying Torah that greatly helps to eliminate suffering and bring people to a deep-seated awareness of God. When you learn Torah, especially with friends and students, translate and explain it in the idiom you best understand. Mashiach's spirit infuses all of Torah. Mashiach is *CHoLeh* (ill) on our behalf (*Sanhedrin* 98b on Isaiah 53:5). By "talking Torah" in a language that is *CHoL* (non-sacred—i.e., not Hebrew), we ease Mashiach's suffering and more strongly infuse ourselves with his spirit, the spirit that recognizes that God is always One and forever *HaTov veHaMeitiv*.

*a gutn Shabbos!  
Shabbat Shalom!*

*agutn yom tov!  
Chag samei'ach!*

—Based on *Likutey Moharan* I, 4 and 118

## SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman once said, "Have you heard me lecture you with words of *musar*?"

Reb Noson writes: "We were a bit amazed by this remark. It seemed to us that his every word was religious and moral guidance. All his words were literally like burning coals, capable of kindling a person's heart with fiery inspiration. Whoever heard him speak was immediately drawn to serve God. Even today, whoever studies Rebbe Nachman's teachings sincerely will be enflamed with a burning desire to come closer to God" (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #124).

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Rebbe Nachman once told an atheist, "I also don't believe in the God you don't believe in!"

## PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

**1:2 Take a census of the entire Israelite community**

*Each Jew Is Precious To God*

Because of God's love for the Jewish people, He commanded Moses to count them. When they fell due to the golden calf, they were counted. When the Tabernacle was established, they were counted (Rashi).

The idea of counting the Jews represents counting the King's legions. In counting the Jews, God demonstrated how precious they were to Him. Each Jew has his own special place, and each one makes a difference. In our present exile, the number of Jews is limited and can therefore be counted. But in the Future, when impurities will be removed from the world, the number of Jews will increase beyond number (cf. Hosea 2:1). For in truth, the Jewish soul transcends time and space—it transcends number (LH IV, p. 96).

**2:2 They should encamp surrounding the Tent of Meeting**

*When Jews Unite, The Torah Is Complete*

The Jews encamped in the desert around the Ark, which was in the center (see Rashi).

Each Jew corresponds to a letter in the Torah. Only when they band together can the Torah be “complete.” Thus, we read about the unity of the Jewish people right before Shavuot, the holiday of receiving the Torah (LH II, p. 105a).

### 3:31 They will be in charge of the Ark

#### *The Blessings We Recite Bear Us Upward*

The Ark carried those who carried it (*Sotah* 35a).

Similarly, the angels who bear the Divine Chariot are actually carried by the Chariot. Thus, the verse states: “The living spirit is in the angels” (Ezekiel 1:20). The living spirit of God is in the angels and carries them, even though they seem to be carrying the Chariot.

For this reason, when a person offers others a drink, he is invited to recite a blessing over the drink, too. Initially, he offered to “carry”—or provide—the drinks. Now, as he recites a blessing over the drink, the drink spiritually “carries” him.

*BeRaKhaH* (ברכה, blessing), is an acronym for the phrase *Ki Ruach HaChayah BaOfanim* ( כִּי רוּחַ הַחַיָּה בְּאוֹפָנִים, the living spirit is in the angels) (LM II, 69).

### 3:45 Take the Levites in place of every firstborn

#### *We Subdue Atheism By Giving Charity*

The first is wisdom (Psalms 111:10).

The “first” (i.e., firstborn) represents wisdom. The Egyptians idolized the firstborn, as they represented the superiority of their atheistic wisdom. When God smote the Egyptian firstborn (i.e., He demonstrated that their wisdoms and atheisms were naught), the Jews were trapped in exile. Then true wisdom—that is, the “supremacy of the firstborn,” representing truth and faith—was revealed, and the Exodus became possible.

Atheism proliferates among those who do not lead spiritually productive lives. We can subdue atheism by giving charity, because charity represents a long and spiritually rewarding life, as in “Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). Through the mitzvah of redeeming the firstborn, we redeem wisdom that may have been blemished and bring it into a sanctified life. The redemption-money goes to the Kohen, who represents

Divine Favor, charity, a rewarding life, and kindness.

This redemption must take place as soon as the child is one month old. *ChoDeSh* (שׁוּדָּח, month) is similar to *ChiDeiSh* (שׁוּדָּח, renew). We must renew ourselves continually so that we do not grow old, so that we do not live an unrewarding life (LH V, p. 41-210a-420).

### 3:48 Give the money to Aaron

#### *Wealth Can Elevate A Person To Spiritual Heights*

Due to the bounty You gave them, they made a golden calf (*Berakhot* 32a).

Wealth is a great blessing. When used properly, it can elevate a person to great spiritual heights. But too often, wealth becomes a vehicle that people use to turn away from God. When the Jews in the desert demanded an idol and killed Chur, who stood in their way, Aaron hinted at their misuse of wealth by saying, “Remove your gold rings...and bring them to me [to build an idol]” (Exodus 32:2). Because they blemished with wealth, the firstborn lost their right to perform God’s service. After the establishment of the Tabernacle, the firstborn redeemed themselves by giving of their wealth to Aaron the Kohen Gadol (LH V, p. 430-216a).

## KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

### 13 — “Happy is the nation that knows the shofar blast” (Psalms 89:16); Divine Providence (continued)

3. By breaking money-lust through giving charity, a person mitigates harsh judgments, finds himself rescued from all troubles, and is called “wise.” As a result of all this, it is possible to elevate Jewish souls, to rejuvenate them, and to bring Torah teachings into the world. These Torah teachings are drawn from the Torah that will be revealed in the future, which is known as the Hidden Torah of the Ancient One. By breaking money-lust through giving charity, a person also effects a unification of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and the Divine Presence.

4. When the sage takes souls and ascends with them, and “brings down its trusted fortress” (Proverbs 21:22)—that is, he generates the Torah teachings mentioned

above—the “two chariots” are thereby rectified. This is what is called the “rectification of the upper chariot and the lower chariot.”

5. Each and every one of the people who come to the sage of the generation has some good will or desire. The tzaddik elevates all these desires and thereby rejuvenates the souls of those people who come to him; and in this way, he “brings down” the Torah-revelation that he will then teach them. Thus, each of the people present has a share in this Torah teaching in accordance with the intensity and nature of his own desires, and to that same degree, he also experiences a positive, spiritual rejuvenation. Therefore, each person must strengthen and rouse himself to come [to the tzaddik] with good desires and with good, strong yearnings for God, so that he might attain the best possible spiritual rejuvenation. We also heard [from Rebbe Nachman] that the crucial time [when all this occurs] is when the sage is preparing himself to say Torah. At that time, each person should examine his deeds, seek to have good desires for God, and offer prayers to this effect. Then the sage will be able to take him by the hand and bring him up from the place where he is, to rejuvenate him with good, new vitality in accordance with the desire that he has at that time.



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