

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

EFFORT IS EVERYTHING

By Ozer Bergman

"It's twenty years that I've worked for you!...I was consumed by scorching heat during the day and frost at night; sleep was driven from my eyes" (Genesis 31:38-40).

Rebbe Nachman got annoyed when someone said that tzaddikim were great because they had great souls. He insisted this was not true, maintaining that their achievements depended completely on good deeds, effort and devotions. He said outright that every person in the world can attain the highest level because it depends on nothing but one's own free choice. "For everything depends on a multitude of deeds" (*Avot* 3:15).

This is a crucial point in growing as a Jew, but one that seems to get very little attention. Perhaps it's so obvious that people don't think of mentioning it, let alone emphasizing it. But we'll mention it and emphasize it. The point I'm referring to is this: Success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

Some things in life are just given. This is how they are and this is how they will be. Your height is your height. As much as you may want, no one can teach you how to be tall.

Other things in life are gifted. You might have a particular talent or aptitude in a certain field. You were born that way, you're a natural. For example, without any previous knowledge or instruction, you may just pick up a guitar and start playing. (Please don't confuse aptitude with mazel. You may have more musical talent than Mozart ever did, but that doesn't mean that it's your mazel to be a world-famous composer.)

Then again, you may not have a special gift. Nonetheless, if you desire, you can try to learn and improve. Yet no matter how much you invest in improving, there's no guarantee that you'll succeed.

There is a curious exception to the foregoing. Your ultimate success in life—the degree of *da'at* (God-consciousness) that you attain—has nothing to do with anything you were given or not given. You may be descended from a long line of the holiest tzaddikim who trace themselves back all the way to King David, or you may be a newly-minted

convert, the child of petty thieves of questionable lineage. You may be gifted or not. You may have the IQ of a genius and a phenomenal memory, or you may be of just average intelligence. None of this makes a difference.

Rebbe Nachman teaches us that Jewish success depends solely on one's own effort. He claimed to be such an example. The Rebbe declared that even if he had not been from the family of the Baal Shem Tov, even if he had come from the lowliest Jewish family, he still would have attained what he did through his intense toil and effort in the service of God.

We don't see Avraham Avinu traveling the length and the breadth of the Holy Land to teach people how to pray to God. We don't see him and Sarah Imeinu cooking, serving and tending to thousands of guests over the decades. We don't see Yitzchak Avinu supervising the search for and digging of wells. We don't see Yaakov Avinu spending fourteen years learning in yeshiva without ever going to bed, and we don't see him birthing livestock, staying up all night or suffering the vagaries of the weather to do an honest job for his employer.

We don't see Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai buried up to his neck in sand, hiding in a cave for twelve years learning Torah. We don't see the years and years that both the Arizal and the Baal Shem Tov spent in fasting and in solitude. We don't see any of their extreme devotion, perseverance or willingness to die—but we reap the rewards.

What are those rewards? One is their merit, which, when we invoke it, redounds to our credit. Another is their teachings, which guide us on every point from the mechanics of how to go about basic human living to how to deal with the deepest (and most confusing) mysteries of life. The greatest reward is that we have the opportunity to live Jewishly, and that we know that if we are determined enough to transform our inspiration into genuine effort, if we truly try, we can discover further opportunities for *da'at* for ourselves and others. Amen. May it be His will.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Shivchei HaRan*
(Rabbi Nachman's Praises) #25-26

SIDEPATH

"What is the nature of free will?" someone once asked Rebbe Nachman.

"Simple," the Rebbe answered. "If you want, you do. If you don't want, you don't do."

Reb Noson adds: I recorded this because it makes a very important point. Many people are confused. They see themselves caught up in their habits and feel helpless to change their ways. They feel that they no longer have the power of free choice. It's just not so! Everyone has free will to do or not to do as he chooses. Understand this! (LM II, 110).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

28:11 He came to the place and slept there, for the sun had set

Climbing Step By Step Up The Spiritual Ladder

The entire account of Jacob's dream alludes to the steps one must take to ascend the spiritual ladder in order to experience higher and higher levels of Godliness.

"He came to the place"—Jacob arrived at the barrier that separates between the Keter, the highest level of intellect, and the levels beneath it.

"He slept there, for the sun had set"—not being able to attain all the intellects in serving God at once, one must rest.

"He took from the stones of the place"—he gathered the sparks of holiness that were there—"and put them beneath his head"—he tied them to his intellect.

"He slept"—after studying Torah (i.e., after gathering the sparks of holiness).

"He dreamt"—this alludes to a person having to come down to this material world where good and evil exist, and choosing good in order to ascend the spiritual ladder.

“A ladder”—this refers to Jacob’s ability to call out to God, for *SULaM* (סולאם, ladder) has the same numerical value as *KOL* (קול, voice). This “voice” refers to both types of cries: those of joy and those of beseeching for salvation from difficulties.

“Angels of God were ascending and descending”—the tzaddikim teach a person how to serve God.

Having merited all these levels, “God appeared above him”—Jacob merited astounding levels of holiness, the Holy Land! This leads to the spread of Godliness throughout the entire world, as God promised Jacob: “You will spread out to the west, east, north and south.”

“All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your offspring”—for one who descends into the material world and ascends from it on his spiritual journey causes the blessings to be effected.

“Jacob awoke...God is in this place and I didn’t know it”—when one delves into his spiritual devotions, tying his Torah to his intellect and striving for the barriers yet not extending beyond his capabilities, he merits to attain the zenith of knowledge, of Godliness.

Yet despite having reached Godliness, he knows that he has still not begun to fully comprehend God’s greatness. Thus, “God is in this place and I didn’t know it”—I am still not aware of God’s true greatness (LH II, p. 148a-296-149a).

28:17 This is the gate of Heaven

Our Prayers Ascend Via The Holy Land

All prayers ascend to Heaven through the Holy Land, so prayer is associated with the Holy Land (LM I, 7:1).

29:1 Jacob lifted his legs

When We Draw Joy Into Our Heart, We Can Dance

Jacob rejoiced in God’s promise of protection and drew that joy into his heart, which then lifted up his legs to walk effortlessly (Rashi).

One must draw his joy into his heart in order to infuse his lower extremities with joy—so

that, for instance, he can lift his legs in dance (LM I, 10:6; see *ibid.*, I, 32).

29:20 They seemed to him like a few days

Time Ceases To Exist When We Serve God Out Of Love

When a person serves God out of love, the amount of time he spends on his devotions is of no consequence to him (LM II, 79).

30:33 My righteousness will answer for me

Charity Can Overcome Evil

Tzidkati (my righteousness) can also mean “my charity.” A person must direct his charity to worthy causes, so that its power can subdue evil (LM I, 251; see *More Blessed to Give: Rebbe Nachman on Charity*).

31:47 Laban called it *Yegar Sahaduta*, but Jacob called it *Gal-eid*

The Holy Tongue Protects From Impurity

Laban and Jacob both gave the monument the same name, “Monument of Witness,” but Laban named it in Aramaic while Jacob named it in Hebrew.

Laban represents *Targum* (the Aramaic translation of the Torah), which acts as an intermediary between the Holy Tongue and evil speech. Laban’s intention was to bring impurity into the covenant he made with Jacob and thereby damage the Jewish people. Jacob was aware of Laban’s intention. Therefore he invoked the Holy Tongue, bringing purity to those who would be members of the covenant with God (LM I, 19:4).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

7 — “And these are the laws” (Exodus 21:1)

1. The redemption [of the Jewish people] primarily depends on faith, since the main cause of the exile is none other than the lack of faith.

2. Prayer is integrally bound up with faith. Prayer is founded upon the belief—the faith—that there exists a Creator Who has the power to generate entirely new phenomena in whatever way He wishes. On

the basis of this faith, a person then prays to God that He should fulfill his request. In turn, he is able to bring about miracles in the world that defy the laws of nature.

3. The essence of faith and, accordingly, also of prayer and of miracles, is only in the Land of Israel. This is the main conduit through which prayers ascend, and a person can accomplish what he needs with his prayers, as well as bring about true miracles and wonders in the world.

4. Faith, prayer, miracles and the Land of Israel are all one concept, and all are dependent on one another.

5. When one blemishes the Land of Israel—which is so closely bound up with faith and with prayer—exile results. This exile is essentially the exile of prayer, wherein it is impossible to pray or to bring about miracles in the world.

6. There are people who obscure all miracles by explaining them in terms of the laws of nature. When these heretics who do not believe in miracles disappear and faith increases in the world, then the Mashiach will come. For the essence of the Redemption primarily depends on this—that is, on faith.

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