

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

FOREVER YOUNG

By Ozer Bergman

"This month is for you, the *roshei* (head, beginning) of the months" (Exodus 12:2).

Rebbe Nachman often talked about the importance of newness, avoiding complacency, and constantly keeping oneself—and one's Jewishness—fresh and vibrant (see *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #51). The following may seem like a digression, but it's really not, especially if you fancy yourself a Breslover or would like to be one. People often say—and there's some truth to it—that the Rebbe is so demanding, he asks so much of a person: Learn a lot of Torah! Put a lot of time and effort into *davening* (praying) well! Do lots of *chesed* (kindness)! And make sure to be very pure and holy. I've got news for you: you want a Rebbe like that! An athlete wants a coach who runs drill after drill that develops conditioning and stamina, so he can perform at a high level while his opponent is conking out. Rebbe Nachman trains us so that we can live at a high level Jewishly and not conk out.

But the suggestion to be "forever young" requires another. And this is crucial bit of information to have if you're going to be a Breslover. When the Rebbe makes a suggestion, he always leaves a clue of how to put the suggestion into practice. The clue may not be obvious, or you may not be ready to find it. But it's there. In order to learn and *daven* a lot (and well), you need motivation. We human beings love newness: *New! First Time Ever! Never Before!* "OK," you're asking, "we have to keep a fresh perspective on Torah and *mitzvot*. How do we do that?"

One keeps a fresh perspective by being a beginner. What does a beginner look like? Like a child. To a child, everything is new. He's never seen it before. He's curious and interested. Any path is as valid as any other. Similarly, to a beginner, each thing and idea can be anything, can lead anywhere. To a child, every word of his teacher is sacred ("Teacher said..."). To a beginner, a teacher's every word is a treasure to be cherished and contemplated over and over. The beginner is also child-like in his humility because he knows something very, very important that is all too easily forgotten: he knows nothing. He still has so much to learn.

We think we've seen and heard it all. But we haven't. Even in our commonest routines, we fail to realize that there are other ways to view and experience the same activity. Try taking a ride in a different vehicle, with a seat higher up

than you're used to, or with seats perpendicular to the driver, to get a different perspective, a newness, that shows you that you haven't begun to see, you haven't begun to know.

Rebbe Nachman reports that there is a near infinitude of amazing, astonishing, mind-boggling events and acts going on all over the world. We have no idea what is going on! Whatever our areas of expertise, book knowledge, or ability to explain a process or event, we cannot begin to fathom how it interweaves with everything else that is going on now, today, or over the course of history.

A beginner is not a slave to preconceptions. This includes being free of the notion that past failure dooms one to future failure. Rebbe Nachman often told how, as a youngster, he would begin serving God with deep devotion and resolve. But temptation would get the better of him and he would fall. Yet that same day, he would begin again, with new resolve toward true devotion. Thus, the Rebbe would fall and begin anew many times each day. He often told us how he had many beginnings, that he continually began serving God anew (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #48, *His Praises* #6). But the Rebbe didn't save his "beginnings" only for when he failed. Whenever he reached a new level of success, he began anew, as if he had not yet taken the first step. He would ask, "How is one worthy of being a Jew?" Until the end of his life, he constantly sought a higher level.

Don't be ashamed to say you know nothing. The Rebbe said many times, "Now I know nothing, nothing—nothing at all!" even claiming, "In truth, I know absolutely nothing at all." After teaching a profound lesson, he insisted he was totally ignorant. He said, "My teachings are very unique, but my not-knowing is even more unique."

When Moshe Rabbeinu objected to going to free the Jews from Egypt because he foresaw he wouldn't be able to free them completely, God told him: You know that it won't work and you're right, but I know better (*Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin* 5:19). Your unsuccessful efforts now make possible the full and final redemption that will ultimately come—speedily, in our lifetime. Amen.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Sichot HaRan* (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*) #3

SIDEPATH

Whenever Reb Noson happened to visit Teplik, R' Feivel would joyously come out to greet him. Once, R' Feivel failed to appear. When Reb Noson asked about him, the people wanted to know which Feivel he was referring to. "Oh! You must mean Feivel-Ashreinu!" they finally said mockingly. "Since you were last here, he passed away."

Taking note of the condescending way in which they had referred to the late chassid, Reb Noson took them to task for it. "In the next world, people are punished by being made to repeat the very same acts they performed in this world," Reb Noson said. "I'll tell you this: R' Feivel's 'punishment' will be to say *Tikkun Chatzot* and dance *Ashreinu*—happy with all the good points he collected in this world!" (*Siach Sarfei Kodesh* 1-786).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

1:1 He called to Moses

We Begin Teaching Torah To Our Children From Vayikra

It is customary to begin a child's Torah education with *Sefer Vayikra* (the Book of Leviticus). The reason is that children are pure, and *Vayikra* speaks about sacrifices offered in a state of ritual purity. "Let the pure come and engage themselves with the study of the pure" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 7:3).

In a Torah scroll, the final letter *aleph* (א) in the word *Vayikra* (וַיִּקְרָא, He called) is written smaller than the other letters. This is referred to as an *aleph ze'ira* (small *aleph*). In Aramaic, the word *aleph* means "teach," and *ze'ira* also connotes "young" or "small." Thus, "*aleph ze'ira*" may be read as "teach the young children"—indicating that we must begin teaching Torah to our children from the Book of Leviticus (*Sefer Vayikra*).

The Book of Leviticus follows directly after the description of the building of the Tabernacle which concludes the Book of Exodus (*Sefer Shemot*), because the purity of

young children emanates from this sanctuary. Each tzaddik also builds a sanctuary, from which the children who relate to him receive their purity (LM I, 282).

1:3 If his sacrifice is a burnt-offering

Inattention During Prayer Is A Form Of Idolatry

The *olah* (burnt-offering) atones for evil thoughts (*Vayikra Rabbah* 7:3).

Olah literally means “ascend.” It can be associated with a person’s thoughts that ascend in a haughty manner; our Sages compare haughtiness to idolatry.

At one time or another, every individual finds his mind wandering during prayer. This state is akin to idolatry, in that the person has fallen away from his former state of closeness to God and his mind becomes occupied with egotistical musings. His rectification is to bring an *olah* or its conceptual equivalent. The effort that he makes in bringing a sacrifice for God’s sake helps him dissolve his arrogance and return to God (LM I, 108).

1:5 Then he will slaughter the young bull before God

Desire And Longing To Serve God Are Our Modern-Day Sacrifices

Today, even without the Temple, we can still bring sacrifices. These are a person’s unending desire and longing to serve God. So powerful are these positive expressions of will that they subdue the forces of evil (LH II, p. 81a).

2:13 Do not discontinue the salt of the covenant of your Lord from your meal-offerings

One Who Guards His Covenant Can More Easily Earn A Living

The Torah describes the use of salt in the sacrifices as a “covenant.” The tzaddik also corresponds to a covenant—the covenant of guarding one’s sexual purity. Just as salt flavors food, guarding the covenant sweetens bitterness—particularly the bitterness of earning a living (LM I, 23:2).

4:2 If someone sins unwittingly

Let Us Make Wise Choices

Isaac represents Gevurah (Judgment). Judgment yields two aspects: wisdom, and the impurities that devolve from the aspect of judgment. Isaac’s son *YaAKoV* (יעקב, Jacob) connotes wisdom, as in the phrase *vaYaAKVeini* (ויעקבני, he outwitted me) (Genesis 27:36). His other son, Esau, represents a sinful soul (LM I, 74). Every person must also make a judgment: whether to follow the path of wisdom and recognition of God, or to embark on the path of sin.

5:22 Or he found a lost object and denied it

Stealing Is Akin To Heresy

The sin of stealing or denying ownership of someone else’s property is akin to heresy. Just as we are forbidden to take another’s property, we are also forbidden to delve into thoughts that are beyond our capacity to understand, for those questions and delving are heretical in nature. Thus, stealing is akin to heresy (LH VII, p. 132a).

5:26 Then he will be forgiven for anything he might be guilty of

Shabbat Helps A Person Atone For His Sins

Adam blemished on the same day (Friday) that he was created. His punishment should have begun immediately, but Shabbat protected him and allowed him to remain in the Garden of Eden until after Shabbat ended (*Zohar* II, 138a).

The power of Shabbat to help a person atone for his sins finds an allusion in the phrase *Le-AShMaH BaH* (לאשמה בה, he might be guilty of), which is an acronym for *Le’El Asher Shavat Mi-kol Ha-ma’asim BaYom HaShivi’i* (לאל אשר שבת מכל המעשים ביום השביעי, to the God Who rested from all His works on the Seventh Day) (Shabbat morning liturgy) (LH VIII, p. 230b).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

11 — “I am God, that is My Name” (Isaiah 42:8)

1. When a person pronounces words of Torah aloud as he studies, his speech enlightens him regarding all the places where he needs to repent, until he merits to do exactly the repentance that he must. Similarly, on each and every occasion, with each bit of repentance that he does, a person ascends from level to level until he comes out of his present low level and arrives at an understanding of the Torah.

2. When a person is careful and ever mindful that the honor of God should be unblemished—while he himself is despicable and loathsome in his own eyes and his own honor means nothing to him compared with the honor of God—he then merits to speak radiant words of Torah that illuminate for him the way to perfect repentance. In this manner, he merits profound levels of understanding in the Torah.

3. But a person cannot merit this kind of radiant speech except by breaking his pride and conceit. He should not study Torah out of a desire for honor or out of contentiousness, God forbid, or in order to receive a rabbinical position or high status. Breaking one’s pride and conceit is also dependent on maintaining one’s sexual purity.



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