

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

NO DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

By Ozer Bergman

“[God] encompassed them and granted them wisdom, protecting them like the pupil of His eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10).

Maybe your verdict is still undecided and you’re looking for something to get you through the year. Rebbe Nachman implied a suggestion. It requires your active participation. This Midrash is a moral tale with many lessons, including: Follow the advice of a tzaddik.

Reb Noson writes:

Someone told me that the Rebbe said that each of his people would ultimately achieve what he needed to. “The Holy One, Blessed be He, wouldn’t do that to me, God forbid, to take away one of my people in the middle of his life.” Each one will certainly live a long, productive life dedicated to God’s service, until he reaches the level of *kedushah* (sanctity) he needs to achieve in this world, for which he was created.

The Midrash relates:

There was a wealthy man whose daughter was extremely pretty and pious. She buried three husbands, each one the morning after the wedding. “No one else will die because of me!” she declared. “I will remain a widow, a spinster, until God sees and has pity!” She remained alone for a long time.

Far away lived the wealthy man’s poor brother. Each day he and the eldest of his ten sons brought bundles of wood from the forest to sell to support his wife and children. One day they sold nothing. With no money for bread, the family did not eat that day.

The next day, father and son returned to the forest, the father wrapped in his misery. Near tears because of their poverty, the son lifted his eyes heavenward. An idea occurred to him and he made a decision. Taking leave of his parents, he set out for his uncle’s home.

When he arrived, his aunt, uncle and cousin were all thrilled to see him. They asked to hear about his father and mother and each of

his brothers. After a week, the young man approached his uncle. “I have a request to make. Please don’t refuse me.”

“My son, ask for whatever you desire.”

“Swear to me that you will agree,” he said. His uncle swore. “Give me your daughter in marriage.”

The wealthy man burst into sobs. “No, please, not that! She suffers my sins.” He told him of her history.

“I’ll risk it,” said the young man.

“Is it money? I will give you all the gold and silver you want. You’re young, bright and handsome. Take my advice—don’t endanger your life!”

“Uncle, you swore.” With no choice, the wealthy man told his daughter. She began to cry and screamed bitterly, “Master of the World! Strike me dead, but don’t let him die on my account!”

As the groom greeted guests at the wedding, a sage—Eliyahu the Prophet—asked for a few words. “I’m going to give you some right advice. Follow it to the last detail. As the wedding meal begins, a mangy beggar in torn, black clothing—barefoot, haggard, with spiky hair—will approach.

“As soon as you see him, rise and seat him next to you. Show him respect. Feed him, pour his drink and serve him quickly. Do as I say and it will be well with you. Now I must be on my way.” Eliyahu left and the groom returned to his seat.

As the wedding feast began, the beggar arrived. When the groom saw him, he rose and followed the sage’s advice exactly. When the feast was done, the beggar called the groom aside. “I’m God’s messenger, come to take your soul.”

“Sir, please grant me time, a year or half a year.”

“No.”

“Thirty days. At least the seven days of the wedding celebration!”

“Not even twenty-four hours will I give you. Your time has come.”

SIDEPATH

Reb Noson: Rebbe Nachman once remarked that the greatest form of *avodah* (religious devotion) is small when compared to the effort one makes in earning a living and acquiring worldly possessions. On the other hand, the greatest form of *avodah* is prayer. Yet when we stand up to pray, we finish the entire prayer service in short order! (*Tzaddik* #558).

“At least let me say goodbye to my wife.”

“This I will grant, but be quick!”

The bride was alone in her room, crying, pleading with her Maker. The groom knocked and she let him in. She hugged and kissed him. “My dear husband, what is the matter?”

“I’ve come to say farewell. The Devil has come to take my soul.”

“Don’t go. Wait here. I will go to speak with him.”

She went and found him. “Are you the one who came to take my husband?”

“Yes.”

“He cannot die now. The Torah says that a man who marries must be home for a year to make his wife happy (Deuteronomy 24:5). God is reality. His Torah is reality. If you take him, you will falsify the Torah. If you accept my words, fine. If not, we will go to God for judgment!”

With that, the Holy One shooed the Devil away.

As groom and bride celebrated their wedding night, her parents sat in their room, weeping. At midnight they rose to dig a grave for their son-in-law. As they passed the newlyweds’ home, they heard the young couple’s joyful laughter and understood—this time was different.

*G’mar chatima tovah!
May your verdict be a good one!*

—Based on *Chayei Moharan (Tzaddik)* #302
and *Midrash Tanchuma, Ha’azinu* #8

THE GREATNESS OF HITBODEDUT

A person's prayers before God in *hitbodedut* are a form of *ruach ha-kodesh* (Divine inspiration). This is how King David composed the Book of Psalms. He aroused himself to pray and speak before God. "To You, my heart spoke," he said (Psalms 27:8). Rashi explains: "To You"—in Your service, as Your messenger—"my heart spoke." King David's heart served as the messenger of the Holy One, delivering the words that God Himself provided for King David to pray before Him. From these words—words of Divine inspiration—the Book of Psalms was formed. Each person's level of Divine inspiration is determined by the extent to which he draws upon himself these words, which come from God (LM I, 156).

Reb Noson was once describing the greatness of *hitbodedut*. Try to picture the Kohen Gadol as he entered the Holy of Holies at the one time of the year that this was permitted—on Yom Kippur. In describing the Kohen Gadol's appearance, the liturgy states that he looked like "one who sits in solitude to pray before God." "Imagine," said Reb Noson, "the Kohen Gadol entering the Holy of Holies is likened to the person who sits and pours out his heart before God" (*Hishtafkut HaNefesh*, Introduction). Through *hitbodedut*, we can, as it were, enter the "Holy of Holies" each and every day!

Concerning *hitbodedut*, Rebbe Nachman gave the following analogy: You'll see that thieves generally congregate around the well-known and oft-used roads, waiting to set upon innocent passersby. Someone who wants to outwit them has to find a new path, so that the thieves won't notice him. The same is true when it comes to prayer. The standard, oft-recited prayers are well-known to the "thieves"—the detractors and forces of the Other Side. *Hitbodedut*, on the other hand, is an entirely new path. Taking this new approach, using new words and original supplications, we can deceive these spiritual "thieves." Then our prayers are able to ascend without hindrance (LM II, 97).

Reb Noson said: Test it out. Practice *hitbodedut* for forty days straight. I guarantee you'll see results (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 66).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

5 — "With trumpets and the sound of the shofar" (Psalms 98:6) (continued)

9. A person must guard himself from extraneous fears so that he is not afraid of anything in the world. Rather, when he experiences some fear or dread, he should immediately remember the fear of God and His great awesomeness, and should draw the fear of God upon himself throughout the day, continuously. In this manner, he will be able to pray forcefully and to utter his prayers with great energy, and his prayer will be as "thunder." He will merit to hear, loudly and clearly, what comes out of his mouth, and through this, merit joy—to perform all the *mitzvot* with great joy over the *mitzvah* itself. In this way, he will merit to know how to nullify all the decrees even after they have been finalized, God forbid.

10. It is also necessary to join love of God to fear of God in order to merit all of the above, since the main way of overcoming [one's enemies] is through love. Nevertheless, the fear must come first.

11. A person who wishes to take pity on his own life must strive not to listen to or pay any attention at all to the conflicts between the tzaddikim who have reached perfection; instead, he should believe in all of them. To the contrary, when he hears the arguments between the tzaddikim, he should take it as a personal reproof and look at himself and at who and what he really is. For with this, they are rebuking him for spoiling the "drops" of his mind [by masturbation], because if his mind were not blemished, he would surely not even hear the arguments between the tzaddikim and would not entertain any questions about them whatsoever. The essence of this conflict is only for him—that is, for the purpose of what was just stated—so that he will understand and remember by means of the conflicts between the tzaddikim who and what he really is, to the point that he is in danger of being driven away from true life—which is the true tzaddikim—through this conflict. This is due to the fact that he blemished the "drops" of his mind, about

which it is written, "All who enter it will not return; they will not attain the paths of life" (Proverbs 2:19; see *Rabbi Nachman's Tikkun*, especially pp. 74-76). Whoever is a fool and does not truly understand this, is distanced as a result of [all] this and squanders his life. But whoever truly wishes to take pity on himself, quite to the contrary, will thereby be awakened and remind himself who and what he really is. He will understand that this is the test he must pass by not hearing or looking at this conflict. Then, precisely through this, he will draw close to the true tzaddikim, which is the whole means of his eternal rectification. For the essence of the conflict between the tzaddikim is primarily for the purpose of this test—so that the person who wishes to distance himself may do so. Indeed, it is appropriate to distance him, since he has blemished the "drops" of his mind. But if he wishes to stand up to this test and to understand the enormity of the damage he has done, and not pay attention to this [conflict], then precisely through this, he will draw close. For since he did such great damage, it is impossible for him to draw close except by means of this particular test. Understand this. For in truth, God desires to do kindness and wishes to draw close those who are far from Him, even though they are not deserving of it. They are unable to draw close, however, except by means of this test.



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