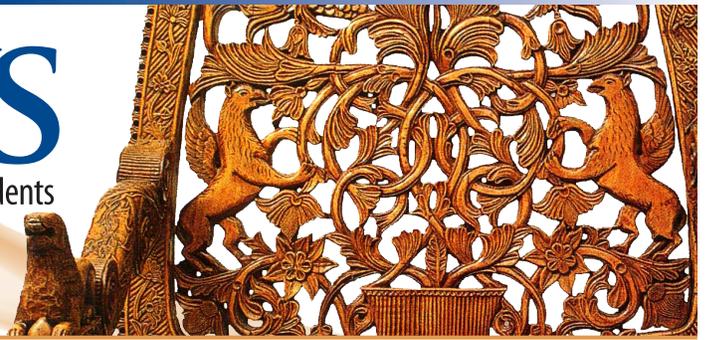


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Shavuot: Our Personal “Giving of the Torah”

By Yossi Katz

After many years of bitter bondage in Egypt, the poor Hebrew slaves emerge victorious and triumphant over their Egyptian slave masters. As they make their way through the desert, they approach Mount Sinai and the purpose of Creation, where the lowest of the low rise to become God’s chosen people.

Moses delivers God’s question to the Hebrews: “Will you accept the Torah and thereby become a treasure among the nations?” They answer, “All that God has spoken, we will do.” Moses then brings the people’s reply to God. God informs Moses that He will appear to him and the people will hear what He says. But then we read one of the most mysterious verses in the Torah: “Moses related the people’s reply to God.” But where was the question, and what was the answer? The Torah does not reveal this to us (see Exodus 19).

In *Likutey Moharan* I, 190, Rebbe Nachman explains what was going on behind the scenes. When the Israelites

*We need good advice and ideas to fulfill the commandments in the best possible way.*

reply, “All that God has spoken, we will do,” they were actually objecting to God’s question. If God outright tells us what to do, how can we possibly maintain our free will? “We will” have to “do” it. Moses brings this question before God.

God replies that He will appear to Moses specifically and address the commandments to him alone; the Jewish people will hear them only as bystanders, thus retaining their freedom of choice.

But then Moses asks, “What about me and my freedom of choice?” This is the meaning of the second occurrence of “Moses related the people’s reply to God,” where the question and answer were not recorded by the Torah. Rebbe Nachman reveals that Moses was repeating the Jewish people’s objection, but this time about himself!

God responds, “Go to the Jewish people and sanctify them today and tomorrow” (and then the Torah will be given). God did not specify explicitly that three days of preparation were necessary in order to receive the Torah; Moses had to grasp this on his own and command the Jewish people to add the extra day (see *Shabbat* 87a for Moses’ calculation). Remarkably, this means that even the giving of the Torah was dependent on Moses’ free will.

Where does this leave us? Are we tzaddikim who are on a level where we have both the ability and need to grasp God’s hidden will? Reb Noson says, “Yes.” Even though the Torah has already been given and the *mitzvot* are known to us, we need good advice and ideas to fulfill the commandments in the best possible way. We also need to find our individual paths within Judaism, and we need to attach ourselves to the proper teacher/Tzaddik. All of this has to be done on our own.

Reb Noson adds that if we concentrate on our eternal purpose, we will discover the hints along the way that lead us to our own personal “giving of the Torah.” Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halachot Birkhat HaShachar 5*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

It is a basic truth that God is very great and that we know nothing at all of the wondrous new things that are happening in the world. Every day and every moment, there are wonders upon wonders. Since God renews [the world] continually, there is a phenomenon whereby everything changes into good. If you cannot see and understand this, at least believe in it. (*Letter #12*)



Everything that is currently happening to us is intended to arouse us from our sleep, so that we will begin anew, to walk in His holy ways, to come close to Him and return to God from wherever we are. (*Letter #167*)

# Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Translated & compiled by Chaim Kramer

*Parashat Bamidbar describes the Israelite encampment in the desert, which still has ramifications for us today.*

**The Israelites should encamp with each man beside the flag that bears the insignia of his father's house. They should encamp surrounding the Tent of Meeting, at a distance from it (Numbers 2:2).**

The Jews encamped in the desert around the Ark, which was in the center (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 (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 105a).

\* \* \*

The Tabernacle was the resting place for the Divine Presence, which manifests via the prayers of the Jews. The entire Jewish nation camped around the Tabernacle, since each Jew acquired a portion in it through his prayers.

For example, just as the contributions of many Jews combined to furnish the 100 silver sockets at the bases of the beams, the prayers of many Jews combined to create all the beams, bars, pillars, tapestries and vessels of the Tabernacle. Today, the more Jews who become involved in prayer, the more parts will be built for the Tabernacle, until the Divine Presence will be revealed once again (*Likutey Halakhot* VIII, p. 102a).

\* \* \*

Each Jew possesses an individual good point with which God exults in him. Similarly, on a national scale, each of the Twelve Tribes was represented by a different flag and a different-colored stone on the Breastplate of the Kohen Gadol. From this, we learn the importance of developing our individuality (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 25a).

Moreover, we cannot truly accept the Torah until everyone's individuality is brought to the fore. Therefore *Parashat Bamidbar* (which opens with the tribe-by-tribe census of the Jewish people) is read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, teaching us the importance of establishing our individuality before uniting for a common cause (ibid., II, p. 50).

The differences between the tribes and their representative flags and colors also allude to the various hints that arouse a person to God. Each person sees God's works from a different viewpoint, and the "call to gather to war" (against the forces of evil) manifests differently to each person (ibid.).

## SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

30. There are many who would spend much time in the lavatory, attempting to totally cleanse out their bodies before praying in the morning. The Rebbe spoke out strongly and ridiculed this practice.

The best thing is to pray as soon as you wake up in the morning. If you can easily attend to your needs then, do so – but if not, pray immediately. Even if you have a slight feeling in your bowels, it can be ignored.



You should also not spend too much time in the lavatory in general, for this can cause all sorts of ailments and severely damage your health.

The Rebbe himself had made this error in his youth, doing many unusual things to achieve bodily purity. He went so far that he endangered his health and even his life. But finally he realized that it was

foolishness and a waste of precious time.

The Rebbe said that it was very important for him to speak out about this, stressing that people not waste time in such foolishness. Even if one must spend time in the lavatory, it is better to leave and return rather than to remain for a long time at once.

31. It is best to pray as early as possible each morning.

Prayer is so lofty and precious, and there is no guarantee that one will merit to pray later. Therefore strive to pray as early as you possibly can.



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*The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman's chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.*