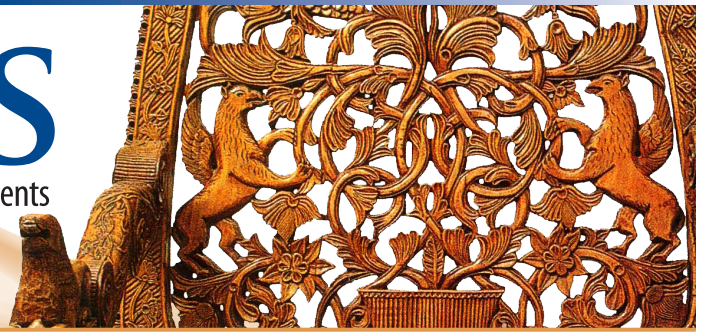


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Beware of Dog

By Ozer Bergman

“When you build a new house, erect a fence around your roof. Do not place any blood in your house, for the fallen will fall” (Deuteronomy 22:8).

“Rabbi Natan says: From which verse do we learn that it is forbidden for a person to raise a vicious dog in his home and to have a shaky ladder in his home? From the verse ‘Do not place any blood in your house’” (*Bava Kama* 15b).

The Giving of the Torah and Creation (which we celebrate on Rosh HaShanah) are intimately connected. The former is the consummation of the latter. Let’s explore the *parashah* to see what it can teach us about them.

At the Giving of the Torah we proclaimed, “*Na’aseh v’nishma*—we will do and will listen”) (Exodus 24:7). We will do now whatever we’re capable of doing, and we will keep our ears attuned to listen, to learn what we can yet build from our lives. Creation certainly was an exercise in building.

Both Torah and creation are our homes. Creation is our home – we live in it! The Torah is our home – it starts with the letter *BaYT* of *Bereishit* – which means *BaYiT* (house). Every day God renews Creation, and every day we have to renew our commitment to Torah. Every day we have to build a “new house” and make a new address for our minds. We have to climb and improve our Jewishness, whether from the outside – by adding to or enhancing our mitzvah performance – or from the inside – by adding to our understanding or feeling for the mitzvot.

Every house has at least two levels, the floor and the roof. When we build this “new house,” we need to “fence in” the roof. Why? Because the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) attacks anyone who climbs up, and tries to make him fall. That’s why God commands us that there be “no blood in your house.” He wants to protect us from “shaky ladders and vicious dogs.”

A strong ladder is an instrument of courage, boldness. One uses such a ladder in the face of a wall that s/he cannot scale. To take a strong ladder and climb shows focus and determination. But a shaky ladder is an invitation to the tragedy of downward spiral. The “shaky ladder” we must not keep in our “house” – our mindset – is the ladder of discouragement. We must be very careful not to dishearten

or embarrass ourselves or others. (Embarrassment is so discouraging!)

Encouragement and determination are fundamental to Judaism. We need them to control body and ego, to say “no” to the latter’s demands for the unnecessary. We need encouragement and determination to overcome bad advice, offered sometimes by those uninterested in our welfare and sometimes by well-meaning friends.

Where do we get this encouragement? “Every day the evil inclination has the power to overwhelm a person. If not for God’s help, s/he would fall into his hand” (*Sukkah* 52b). “God’s help” is the encouragement the tzaddikim provide us via their lessons and conversations. We can access this encouragement by studying their works, or by having a talk with a like-minded friend.

But “Beware of Dog!” Even though determination is necessary, there’s no need to be brazen as a dog. Don’t “raise one in your house.” Don’t use brazenness for any purpose that doesn’t foster genuine spiritual growth.

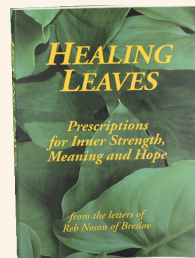
Never forget that “the fallen will fall.” We all have spiritual ups and downs. But a spiritual descent is always sent to help us pay closer attention and to “hear” what we are still capable of. Make sure your ladder is not shaky and the dog isn’t vicious. Make sure the “fence” is in place before the “fall.” Then, at worst, you will stumble, but you will not fall.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhot
Ma’akeh u’Shemirat HaNefesh 4:3
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Whatever may be happening to a person at any time in his life, from his childhood right through his old age, he must use precisely this to come closer to God. (*Letter* #339)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

“When you go out to war against your enemies and God your Lord delivers them into your hands, and you take some of them captive” (Deuteronomy 21:10).

Scripture uses the same expression of “going out” when it speaks of engaging in business, as it is written, “Rejoice, Zebulun, when you go out” (ibid., 33:18). Rebbe Nachman explains the connection as follows:

“When you go out”—this refers to conducting business. The field of business is a battleground in which a person must fight against his evil inclination in order to maintain his honesty and integrity.

“To war against your enemies”—it is then a time of war with the enemy—i.e., the forces of evil—which have trapped the fallen sparks of holiness. The Kabbalah teaches that man’s mission is to gather the sparks and elevate them to their original level. Through the honest “give and take” of business, one “takes” the fallen sparks in the object he sells or trades, and “gives” them over to a higher level.

“And God your Lord delivers them into your hands”—the hands represent faith, as it is written, “His hands were faith” (Exodus 17:12). When a person conducts his business faithfully and honestly, he removes and elevates the sparks of holiness from the side of evil.

“And you take some of them captive”—this refers to the Torah, as it is written, “You ascended on high; you took a captive” (Psalms 68:19; see Rashi). By binding your inner thoughts to the Torah while conducting your business, you can win the war (*Likutey Moharan I*, 280:2-3).

* *

“Pay him his wages that day” (Deuteronomy 24:15).

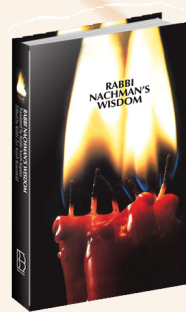
When Adam was cursed to toil, God told him, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat” (Genesis 3:19).

Apekha (brow) literally means “your nose,” referring to the way the nose flares in anger and frustration while one tries to earn a livelihood. Thus, the Torah commands the employer to pay the worker’s wages right away and not make him wait, in order to mitigate that anger and frustration (*Likutey Halakhot VIII*, p. 191a).

SIDEPATH

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

57. The Rebbe once told us that in his youth, he was greatly afraid of death. He feared this greatly. Even so, he would ask God to allow him to die for His sake.



The Rebbe did not remember how long this lasted – perhaps for a year. All during this time, he would not say a prayer without also asking God to allow him to give his life for His Name. He constantly included this petition, despite his great terror of death.

So great was the Rebbe’s fear of death that these prayers themselves were like giving his life.

From this we learned that to serve God, you must overcome precisely the thing that overwhelms you most.

It is written, “You should love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). According to the Talmud, “with all your soul” means that one should give his life for God. “With all your might” means that the same is true of all one’s money (*Berakhot* 54a).

The Talmud then asks: If one must give his life for God, why is it necessary to state that he must also give his money? It answers that there are some people who value their wealth more than their lives (ibid., 61b). Understand this.



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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.