

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Home Sweet Home

By Yossi Katz

AS I WRITE these words, I realize that today, the eve of Thanksgiving, is the busiest travel day of the year. Although it will take many millions of people hours longer than usual to get where they want to go, nevertheless, for the sake of spending time with close friends and family, they feel it's well worth the long-haul. Why? Because the feeling of closeness that connecting with loved ones affords is so intrinsic to our very beings that we are willing to go the "extra mile" just to get there.

In this week's *parashah* we read about a peculiar incident. Abraham's dear wife Sarah passes away and Abraham seeks a specific place to bury her, *Maarat HaMakhpelah*. This burial place was no ordinary cave, but the gateway to the Garden of Eden. The local owner, Ephron HaChiti, was willing to give it to Abraham outright. But Abraham insisted on purchasing the cave for a small fortune. Why?

We find a similar episode involving King David and the future site of the Holy Temple. Here, too, King David insisted on purchasing the property. Both *Maarat HaMakhpelah* and the Temple Mount are places of special elevated holiness. Inasmuch as God is present everywhere, His Presence is felt to a much greater degree in these places.

In our own homes, surrounded by close friends or family, we feel an inner peace and clarity. Life's problems seem a little more distant. The good times give us the ability to breathe and think about life in a deeper and more objective way. Similarly, the Land of Israel as a whole, and its holy places to a greater extent, are places where we can feel a deep connection to God and observe His hand weaving together the various events in our lives. The Land of Israel is our spiritual home because it's the

place where every aspect of life comes together, where we can experience purpose even in the mundane.

For this reason, the holy places had to be specifically purchased from the locals. The locals did not appreciate the spiritual power of these spots. They believed in the natural order of the world and could not tell the difference between these places and other places. Therefore Abraham felt the need to exchange large sums of money for the land.

Money epitomizes the mentality of "living for a buck" (or many bucks), accumulating riches in order to live the good life while forgetting about God in the process. When our heads are involved with making money, it's easy for us to lose track and think that everything in our lives revolves around this process. On a certain level, the pursuit of wealth can become akin to idol worship, the opposite of belief in God. Abraham understood that he could redeem this special land only by dealing in the "currency" of its land owner.

Thankfully, Abraham was able to purchase *Maarat HaMakhpelah* and King David was able to purchase the Temple Mount. As a people, we wait for the time when Mashiach will come and the full spiritual potential of these places will be revealed. However, many of us do not reside in the Holy Land, and even those who do may not always feel the connection in our ongoing state of exile. Similarly, we all experience moments in our lives where God's workings seem revealed to us and other times where life seems mundane or even difficult. However, with faith, we can always stay connected.

We express this thought every day in the Shema: "When you sit in your home and when you walk in the street." No matter where we go, we never leave home. With faith, we live with the understanding that God is always with us and that everything we experience is always for our best.

Likutey Halakhot, Piryah VeRivyah 5

Thanksgiving for the Jews

Roast turkey was on the menu this week in homes across America. Meanwhile, in Israel, the stores are already selling soufganiot. For we Jews have our own holiday of thanksgiving: Chanukah.

The ultimate bliss, the pleasure of pleasures, is to experience the Oneness of all. Not only to experience yourself as part of Creation, but as “part” of the Source of all. To know that your personal life has eternal meaning within the purpose of the existence of all. To know that whatever happens to you, every single experience, is somehow a message from God to you, to teach you how to live your life. To give thanks to the One Who shared of His Oneness, even – and especially – during the “bad” times.

Within the Divine plan for our ultimate good, God must sometimes give us a painful lesson. Yet within the pain we experience is hidden the Divine Love, for the pain is only for our good, that we learn our lesson. It sometimes takes a long time until we get the message – perhaps years, decades, or even lifetimes. When, finally, you get the Divine message, you will be full of thanksgiving for all the pain you experienced and realize that it was for your own good the whole time (*Likutey Moharan I, 4:1-4*).

Chanukah is a time of such thanksgiving, a taste of the World to Come (ibid. II, 2:1). It is a world hidden from the physical eye, a word you must sense spiritually. The more you satiate your physical senses, the more you dull your spiritual sense. To the extent you are able to transform sensual yearnings into a yearning for the spiritual, the thanksgiving you experience will be beyond words – a taste of the World to Come.

So when you kindle the Chanukah candles, observe their physical light. See through the physical flames and behold their spiritual light. See that beyond the world you see with your physical eyes exists a world without friction or strife. It is a world where you are one with yourself and with all, where you can give thanksgiving to the Source of all life.

From “Chanukah with Rebbe Nachman of Breslov”

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

LAND OF ISRAEL. 20. The graves of the Tzaddikim literally have the holiness of the Land of Israel, as it is written, “The righteous shall inherit the land” (Psalms 37:29). The Land of Israel is a *tikkun* for abuse of the holy Covenant. That is why one should make every effort to visit the graves of the Tzaddikim. The sanctity of their burial place is a *tikkun* for the Covenant (*Likutey Moharan I, 109*).



THE COVENANT. The *Brit* is the foundation of the Jewish people and the Jewish religion. There is no single word in English that conveys the richness of meaning in the word *Brit*, which is usually translated as “Covenant.” The *Brit* that God struck with Abraham (Genesis 17) was the source of the special relationship between God and those of Abraham’s descendants who observe the obligations that the *Brit* carries with it.

1. If you guard the Covenant in purity, you will be worthy of true prayer (*Likutey Moharan I, 2:2*).
2. The sexual appetite is the root of the evil inclination. It is the source of all impurity. Confronting the sexual desire is the main trial one has to face in this world. Happy indeed is the one who wins the battle (ibid. I, 6; *Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom #115*).



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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.