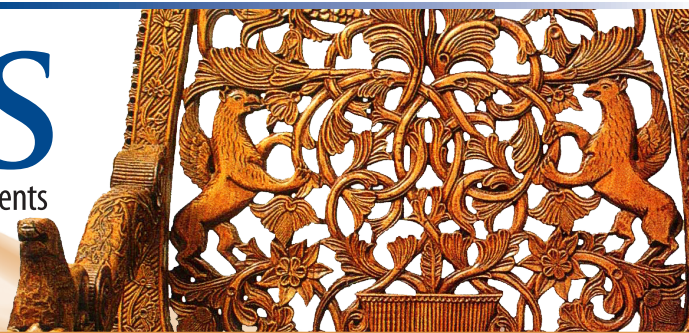


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT PARASHAT MISHPATIM • 5777 • VOL. 7 NO. 19

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Get Smart

By Yossi Katz

As I'm sitting in the airport terminal waiting for my flight home, I can't help but notice the incredible amount of technology being used all around me. Just about every person is browsing on a smartphone, tablet or laptop. These devices are our connection to the internet and to a vast "web" of information about anything and everything.

An outside observer, or perhaps even our own grandparents, would assume our generation to be the most intelligent and, accordingly, happiest ever. But guess what? Despite all the technology and innovation, life doesn't seem to be any easier to make sense of – or to live through. Though our generation is able to explain how and why things happen, people are as desperate for direction and meaning today as ever before. How is it possible that civilization has advanced so much technologically, yet made no progress in understanding the most basic question: "What's it all about?"

The critical flaw in the advancement of civilization can be traced back to a moment in our *parashah* when God is about to share with mankind the blueprint of the universe: His holy Torah. He asks the nations of the world whether they would like to receive this knowledge. The nations proceed to ask God what is written in the Torah, and, upon hearing some of its restrictions, astonishingly reply in the negative. Why would they decline the opportunity to finally gain the key to understanding life's greatest mysteries? Because they couldn't help themselves. Although their question seemed fair and logical, it placed an insurmountable barrier between finite mankind and infinite God. They had put their human intellect forward, and were now limited by it. There was no room left to explore the great and wondrous things that lay beyond the pale of human understanding.

The Jewish People, in contrast, had an entirely different attitude. They said, "We will do and then we will understand." But how is that even possible? Don't you first need to know what you're agreeing to before you accept? In truth, the Torah actually says that the Jewish People replied, "All that God has said, we will do and then we will understand." They already knew what was written in the Torah. But if that were true, then what was so great about their response? And why do our Rabbis teach that they were worthy of receiving the Torah because of their response?

The answer is that the Jewish People were the humblest of all people, and therefore they were willing to forgo imposing their intellectual limitations on God. Their faith in God empowered them to let go and open up their minds to the awesome, infinite knowledge that lay beyond. They were willing to first "do" what was required, and then wait until they would be blessed with "we will understand." Thus, they were the ones who became known as the "Generation of Knowledge."

All of the incredible inventions in our world, from the time of the Industrial Revolution until today, have not brought a real solution to our woes and pains because they fail to acknowledge that no matter how smart or advanced we become, we still remain mere mortals with an extremely limited viewpoint. God has created everything for a very specific purpose. Everything we experience and endure has tremendous potential for growth. However, not only will man never access this knowledge, but the false assurance of Western "progress" serves only to reinforce his limited viewpoint.

The Torah is called an elixir of life. It contains tools that give meaning to our every interaction. By humbling ourselves and living a life of faith, we can receive the Torah anew today just as yesterday. We, too, can say, "First we will do, and then WE WILL understand!" Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Nefilat Apayim 4

A Message in Code

By Gedaliah Fleer

ON MY TRIP to Uman in 1963, Reb Michel Dorfman gave me a small, handwritten book penned by Reb Alter Tepliker. “This book is very dear to me,” Reb Michel said. “But if I remain in Russia, so few people will ever see it and in the end it will be lost. I am giving this book to you as a gift, since you will be able to take it out of the country.”

When I came to Israel and showed it to Reb Hirsch Leib Lippel, he told me that it really belonged to him. He said that after Reb Alter had transcribed the book, he left it with his son, and Reb Hirsch Leib had bought the book from him for 50 rubles. However, when Reb Hirsch Leib was ready to leave Russia, he was afraid to take the book with him, so he left it with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz, who gave it to Reb Michel, who had married his granddaughter.

“Reb Michel gave you this book so that it should reach me, because it is mine,” Reb Hirsch Leib insisted. “But if it is in your possession, it means that it was supposed to be in your possession. Just allow me to look at it.”

Every day R’ Hirsch Leib told me how much the book was reviving him. Since it was written in a cryptic style, I wondered how he had learned to decipher it. He told me that Rabbi Avraham had stayed up an entire night studying the book until he figured out its code. Then he explained to Reb Hirsch Leib the meaning of each and every word.

Some time later, Reb Hirsch Leib agreed to show me, Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld and Leibel Berger the meaning of the abbreviated words. Yet we were unable to understand the book’s deep and profound meaning.

I did understand one thing. Rebbe Nachman said that the Mashiach will redeem Israel with a “general redemption” and a “private redemption.” And before the redemption, the Mashiach will come to Rebbe Nachman’s *tziyun* (grave) in Uman.

After I saw those words written in the manuscript that Reb Alter had copied directly from a manuscript written by Reb Noson, my desire to reach the *tziyun* for Rosh HaShanah grew even greater.

From “Against All Odds”

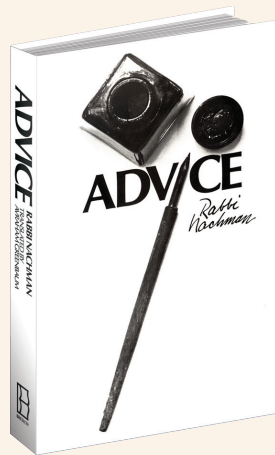
SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 34. When one merely has a stray thought or fantasy, it is sufficient to say these two verses as we have mentioned. But certain people are plagued by sexual fantasies all the time. They find they cannot rid themselves of them. In this case, they must bring themselves to tears when they take on the yoke of Heaven. They must literally weep as they say the words “Hear O Israel” and “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom” (*Likutey Moharan I*, 36:6).

35. The level of religious perception that a person can attain depends on the degree of purity he achieves. It is a fundamental principle that one can only comprehend the words of the Tzaddik if he first purifies himself. Immorality leaves a blemish on the mind. Not only will one fail to understand what the Tzaddik is saying, but he is also in danger of putting the wrong interpretation on the words. He can easily stumble if he follows the crookedness of his heart and accepts the distorted logic of the doubts with which his head is filled (*ibid.*).

36. Sexual temptation can literally make a person go out of his mind. This is why the medical authorities have written that castration is a cure for madness (*ibid.*).



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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.