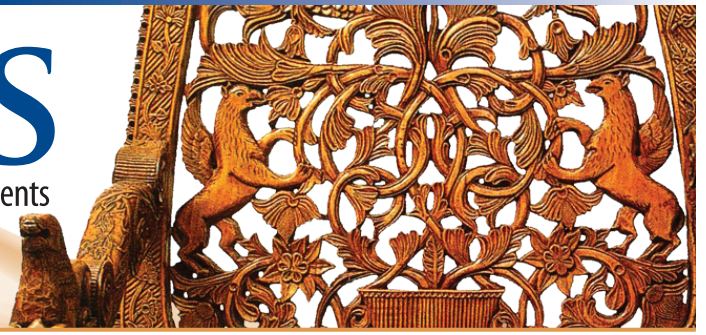


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYIKRA • 5778 • VOL. 8 NO. 20

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The Poor Man's Offering

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF THE greatest gifts that Chassidic teachings impart to us is the ability to illuminate and make relevant all parts of Torah, even the seemingly obscure ones. The teachings of Rebbe Nachman and Reb Noson make the Torah come alive, helping us find answers and life advice in verses of the Torah that cynics claim are irrelevant and archaic. These incredible teachings reinforce our belief in the profound depth and truth of the Torah and its authentic interpreters, the Tzaddikim.

One such idea that seems to be “out of date” is the idea of animal sacrifices. The Torah states, “When a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to God, from animals” (Leviticus 1:2). Rebbe Nachman shines a beautiful light on one of the lessons that we can glean from the Temple sacrifices even today:

When people want to become truly religious and serve God, they seem to be overwhelmed with confusion and frustrations. They find great barriers in their path and cannot decide what to do. The more they want to serve God, the more difficulty they encounter.

All the enthusiasm that such people have when trying to do good is very precious, even if their goal is not achieved. All their effort is counted like a sacrifice... You may wish to perfect and sanctify yourself, but find yourself unable to do so. Still, the effort and suffering involved in the frustrated attempt are not in vain. They are all an offering to God. ...

Therefore, always do your part, making every effort to serve God to the best of your ability. ... Do everything in your ability, and God will do what is good in His eyes (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom #12).

Reb Noson elaborates on this idea by illuminating one of the laws of the *minchah*-offering. The *minchah*-offering is often brought by the poor, who cannot afford the price of an animal; they are instructed to bring an offering of flour instead. Yet when referring to the one who brings this offering, the Torah calls him a “soul” rather than a “man.” Rashi explains that it is as if God is saying, “I consider it as if he has sacrificed his very soul!”

One may never assume, God forbid, that because of all his shortcomings and errors, he cannot come close to God. On the contrary! Just like the poor man who can't bring an expensive animal, he can still gather together a few pennies and offer flour. God values the sincere offering of the pauper – whether he lacks materially or spiritually.

Our Rabbis teach that today our prayers are in place of the sacrifices and Temple offerings. When someone feels his physicality and smallness before God and pours out his heart before his Father in Heaven – even if it seems he can't concentrate properly or have the right intentions – that prayer has great value on high. “He has neither despised nor abhorred the cry of the poor, neither has He hidden His face from him; and when he cried out to Him, He heard” (Psalms 22:25).

The main thing is for us to act humbly, pouring forth our sincerest thoughts and desires in conversation with God. Then, despite whatever personal shortcomings we have, God will turn to us wherever we are. Furthermore, these prayers that are offered from a position of distance and lowliness are most valued and potent. May we all merit to bring the poor man's offering – today!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefilat Minchah 7

Six Questions

ONE OF THE six questions put to a person by the Heavenly Court is: Did you hope for the Redemption? (*Shabbat* 31a). Reb Nachman of Tulchin said that this refers not only to the redemption of the Jewish people as a whole, but also to each individual's personal redemption. "Did you hope for God's salvation to bring you out of your troubles? Or did you lose hope and give up?" (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 80).

* * *

Once, on an intermediate day of Pesach, a young man came to Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz to speak to him about Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Because the young man had only recently become interested in Breslov Chassidut, Rabbi Avraham spoke with him at length.

At the end of the conversation, Rabbi Avraham saw how sad and troubled the chassid appeared. The young man sensed this and began to relate all the difficulties and opposition he was encountering since becoming a Breslover chassid.

This is what Hillel did: He took the Pesach-offering, matzah and maror, and ate everything together.

Rabbi Avraham said to him, "Nu! Today is Pesach, the time of our redemption," and started speaking to him about the greatness of Pesach, the Exodus, and the true meaning of freedom. He gave him much advice and encouragement to help him through these trying times.

At the end of the conversation, he said, "PeSaCh has the same numerical value as NaChMaN (148). How can we connect Rebbe Nachman and the concepts of Pesach? The Haggadah teaches us, "This is what Hillel did: He took the Pesach-offering, matzah and maror, and ate everything together."

Rabbi Avraham advised the young chassid to accept Hillel's teaching. We can partake of the Pesach – the true Tzaddik – only by experiencing bitterness and difficulty. Then we can fully appreciate these teachings.

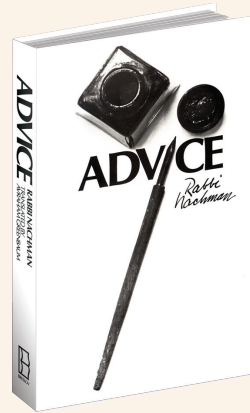
"Now," Rabbi Avraham said, "go home and have a very joyous Pesach!" (*Oral tradition*).

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HITBODEDUT. 4. Within every Jew there is a good "point" – and it is precious indeed – whose only desire at all times is to do the will of her Master. But lust and desire break the heart. Make it a habit to speak to God. Then your good point will send its radiance into your heart, and you will be able to destroy the "foreskin of the heart" – the impulses and desires that break and destroy the heart (*Likutey Moharan* I, 34:7, 8).

5. In all your prayers and conversations with God, be sure to be absolutely honest and truthful (*ibid.* I, 38:5).



6. Everyone must strive to be totally merged with the Source of his being. The only way to attain *bitul* is through secluded prayer with God (*ibid.* I, 52).

7. The best time to seclude yourself to pray is at night, when everyone is asleep. Ideally you should go to a place outside the city and follow a solitary path that people don't go even in the daytime.

Empty your heart and your whole consciousness of all your involvements in the everyday world. Then work to nullify all your character traits, one after the other, until you reach the point where you are free of any self-centeredness and any sense of independent existence. Then you will be worthy of attaining true *bitul* and your soul will be merged with its root (*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.