

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

HOLD ON!

By Ozer Bergman

“God said to Moshe, ‘Go tell Pharaoh that if he doesn’t let My people go, I will strike Egypt with blood ... frogs ... lice ... wild beasts ... pestilence ... boils ... hail ...” (see Exodus 7:16–9:22).

It’s not that well-known, but we Jews believe in an apocalypse. Major changes are coming. This world is going to come to a frightening end, something like an earthquake, only the Richter scale won’t be able to measure it. As the Good Book says, God will “grasp the corners of the earth* and shake the wicked from it” (Job 38:13). Even if this week’s *parashah* doesn’t give us an actual glimpse of what the apocalypse will look like, it does give us a pretty fair inkling.

First, we need to know that the Egyptians of long ago were not just a superpower or a despotic kingdom that enslaved various nations. (The Israelites weren’t Egypt’s only slaves. They were Egypt’s slaves of slaves.) The Egyptians were an extremely rational people, a “control freak” nation (to coin a phrase). They maintained a precise order in their society, a tight rein on their citizens, a firm belief in their deities and rigid practices to appease those deities. Therefore it came as something of a shock to them that an Israelite could speak so demandingly to Pharaoh in public, at the palace (Exodus 7:10), and in private, by the riverbank (ibid., 7:15); that slaves should stop working for them; and that their deities should suddenly exhibit impotence, despite receiving the respect that had always been given to them.

Their world was being hit by one earthquake after another. Slowly, very slowly—too slowly and too late for many of them—the Egyptians understood that the perception of reality they had had for years was distorted and, ultimately, false. They were shaken from their world.

What will happen to us when our world gets shaken?

Rebbe Nachman tells us what we can do to survive the apocalypse. We have to seek the privilege and merit of being attached to the tzaddik. So we have two questions: What

does it mean to be attached to a tzaddik? And, how, or why, does the attachment keep one from being shaken off?

“Attachment to the tzaddik” is, in fact, a central tenet in Rebbe Nachman’s teachings, with a number of applications. At its core, being attached to the tzaddik means to meld oneself, one’s thinking and way of thinking with that of the tzaddik. That is, to be of one mind with the tzaddik, ideally to such an extent that the tzaddik himself would consider you a part of him. The more one studies the tzaddik’s teachings and puts the tzaddik’s advice into practice, the more his mind becomes more tzaddik-like.

So, good. Now I’m “holding on,” attached to the tzaddik. Why won’t he (and I) be shaken off? The tzaddik can’t be shaken off the world because he is the foundation of the world (Proverbs 10:25). What does that mean? It means that he justifies the (continued) existence of Creation because he actually lives life with the purity and generosity that God intends and hopes all humankind will live by. For one who lives with that level of truth and devotion to God, the more things change, the more they stay the same. It was God before. It is God now. It will always be God.

Establishing and maintaining attachment to the tzaddik takes effort and vigilance. One has to withstand skepticism and misguided ideas that others try to feed him, whether intentional or not. Reb Noson, knowing how important it is to be attached to the tzaddik, once told Rebbe Nachman that he wanted to be attached to him. The Rebbe said, “I have you already. I put you in a sack.” Reb Noson replied, “Rebbe! Please tie the sack up tight so I can’t get out!” Even a person who thinks his faith in God, Torah and tzaddik is bulletproof never knows when he may face his own personal apocalypse. Hold on tight and don’t let go!

*Long before Columbus, the holy *Zohar* and the Talmud taught that the world is round/oval. The Kabbalah explains that the “corners of the earth” means that the world is not a smooth surface.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Sichot HaRan*
(Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom) #22

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman teaches:

Creation has many parts. Yet all the various parts of Creation emanate from God. He is One. He is Simple. Our mission in this world is “to reveal the unity from amongst the many.” That is, from all of us—from all our differing thoughts, perspectives, deeds, backgrounds, and so on—we still come to recognize the One God (LM II, 2:6).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

6:3 I did not reveal to them My Name YHVH

When One’s Da’at Is In Exile, God’s Compassion Is Hidden From Him

When one’s *da’at* (awareness of God) is in exile, his speech (which is the expression of his *da’at*) is in exile as well. It is then very difficult for him to recognize God, and as a result, God’s compassion remains hidden from him (LM I, 56:7).

6:7 Know that I am God your Lord, Who took you out from Egyptian oppression

Knowledge Of God Is The Way Out Of Personal Exile

A person must bring the knowledge of God and His miracles on behalf of the Jewish people into his consciousness. With that awareness, he can leave his personal exile (LM I, 21: end).

6:9 They didn’t listen to Moses because of their broken spirits and the hard labor

Faith Makes Serving God Easy

When someone has no more than a minimal amount of faith, he must engage in very difficult devotions in order to serve God. Conversely, a person who possesses abundant faith can easily serve God. Thus, “They didn’t listen to Moses”—they weren’t able to readily serve God—“because of their

broken spirits"—because religious devotions were "hard labor" for them (LM II, 86).

6:14 These are the heads of their families

Recalling The Merit Of Our Patriarchs Invokes Divine Providence

"The heads of their families" is a reference to the Patriarchs (LM I, 13:4). The Patriarchs correspond to three colors of the eye (the white of the sclera, the red of the muscle, and the colored iris). When we invoke the merit of the Patriarchs, this in turn invokes Divine Providence, God's overseeing eye. More specifically, their merit illumines the fourth color of the eye, the black pupil, which allows us to focus upon God.

Corresponding to these four colors of the eye, the Torah is divided into four parts: cantillations, vowel-points, crowns upon the letters, and the letters themselves. Like the Patriarchs, the Torah also serves to draw Divine Providence into the world (ibid.).

7:4 I will take out My armies

Give Strength To Your Guardian Angel

"My armies" are the angels (LM II, 5:10). The Exodus occurred in the month of Nisan, which is the time that angels are strengthened. ("Strengthening the angels" implies the strengthening of angels over demons and other forces of evil.) Thus, when God took the Jews out of Egypt, He brought forth and strengthened the angels as well.

Similarly, when an individual emerges from his own personal exile and focuses on spiritual pursuits, he strengthens his own guardian angel.

7:9 Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh—it will become a snake

Torah Learning Illuminates The Paths of Repentance

When Moses began to perform the miracles before the Egyptians, Yochani and Mamre said to him, "Are you bringing straw to Afarayim [a place with abundant straw]?" In other words, "Are you bringing sorcery to Egypt, the land of sorcery?" Moses replied, "People say, 'Carry vegetables to the vegetable market'" (*Menachot* 85a). In other

words, Moses was bringing his "wares" to a place where sorcery was appreciated.

In this Talmudic passage, the word *TeVeN* (תבן, straw) alludes to *TeVunah* (תבונה, understanding), which is associated with repentance. *AFaRayim* (עפריים) is similar to *AFar* (עפר, earth). The Aramaic word for vegetables, *yarka* (ירקא), corresponds to repentance. And the Aramaic word *ShKoL* (שקול, carry) is similar to *miShKaL* (משקל, balance), which forms part of the phrase *teshuvat ha-mishkal* (תשובת המשקל, measure-for-measure repentance).

Thus, the Egyptians were asking Moses, "Are you trying to bring Torah understanding to people [i.e., the Jews] whose spiritual level is low and earthly?" Moses answered, "When people learn Torah, their speech in Torah learning illumines the paths of repentance, so they are able to perform exact, measure-for-measure repentance even if they are on a low spiritual level" (LM I, 11:1).

7:20 All the water in the river turned to blood

Water Can Be A Blessing Or A Punishment

Blood represents judgments, but water can also represent judgments. For water not only brings blessing and bounty to man, it can also be an instrument of punishment (as God drowned the evil Generation of the Flood; or witness modern-day tsunamis, tidal waves, torrential rainstorms, flooding, and the like). Because the Egyptians were wicked and aroused judgment upon themselves, the water that normally brought them blessing and bounty was transformed into blood, a vehicle of judgment (LH IV, p. 40a).

9:29 I will spread out my hands to God

Idolatry And Immorality Inhibit A Person From Praying Wholeheartedly

Because the city was filled with idolatry, it was not a place fit for prayer to God. Therefore Moses had to leave it in order to pray (LM I, 7:1). We, too, must flee idolatrous and immoral places and situations in order to pray with all our hearts.

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

8 — "I looked, and behold, a golden candelabra" (Zechariah 4:2) (continued)

8. *Tzitzit* embody the concept of the holy breath of life. With the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, a person can make up all that he lacks by sighing. He also subdues the breath of life of the forces of impurity, the "raging storm wind," and the breath of spiritual pollution, and expels the bad from the good in all of his character traits. In turn, he can overcome the opponents and the wicked, and subdue them completely. [It may be understood from this that it is beneficial for a person to sigh as he is wrapping himself in his *talit*, since that time is a particularly propitious one for tapping into the breath of life to fill what he lacks.]

9. The tzaddik hears the sighs of all those who are attached to him, since from him, life goes out to every one of them. He is "a man who possesses breath (*ruach*)" (Numbers 27:18), about whom our Sages, of blessed memory, taught: "He knows how to approach each person according to his own spirit (*ruach*)" (Rashi on Numbers 27:18). In other words, he supplies and makes up what is lacking in the breath of life of each and every one of them.



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