

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

TORAH— WHO NEEDS IT?

By Ozer Bergman

Our hands are full of blood, our wallets full of theft, our minds full of—tepid thoughts. We're supposed to be excited, motivated and in full pursuit of *teshuvah* (return to God). Instead, we're distracted, uncertain and hesitant. Rosh HaShanah is just two weeks away. For crying out loud—Elul has been here for two weeks already! I can't make up my mind. Do I want to do *teshuvah* or not?

Certainly part of me—the real part of me, the Jewish part—does, but the way is so long and so difficult. Sometimes it's like walking in sand, other times like walking through mud or slime. It's so slow, tedious, painful. I tell myself over and over, "I want to do *teshuvah*. I want to do *teshuvah*." But it's so hard. The road behind me is littered with my greed and pride, lust and lies, and their memories block me at every turn, at every budding thought of being a better Jew.

I was able to sin alone and often did. I still can. Sigh. But I can't seem to do *teshuvah* on my own. If only there was someone I could buddy up with, or some way to pave and clear the road.

Young Jew, your prayers have been answered! You know, one of the many differences between extraordinary tzaddikim and Jews like us is that in the wake of failure and collapse, we see despair and they see opportunity. For example, way back when, in the desert, we Jews shared the amazing experience of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, the most incredible revelation of God the human race has witnessed. Yet only forty days later, we shared a nosedive into the cesspool of idol-worship known as the Golden Calf.

Game over, right? Bye-bye, Chosen People. That's not only what most of us thought, that's what God said! (Exodus 32:10). But in God's anger, Moshe Rabbeinu saw an opportunity to reveal God's mercy. So back up the mountain he went, for another forty days, and then again for a third forty-day tête-à-tête (from the start of Elul through Yom Kippur) with the Creator.

Over those last forty days, Moshe Rabbeinu accomplished something extraordinary. He bound himself to *every* Jew, even the least of them, by laying his life on the line for them, by giving God the ultimatum: "Either forgive them or erase my name from the entire Torah" (cf. Exodus 32:32). In fact, whenever Moshe Rabbeinu "assembled the whole congregation of Israelites" (ibid. 35:1), he wasn't ordering them/us to attend a lecture. He was uniting and binding himself with even the least of the least.

For you and me, in an era of the "least of the leasts" (in Kabbalah-speak, we latter-day Jews are known as "the feet"), what does this mean? It means that even though we've stooped to doing and wanting things that put us outside the Pale of Judaism, Moshe Rabbeinu found that even "down there," in those lowlifes, there is true Godliness. But more. He united himself to that—to us. By doing so, we're no longer "down there," a million light-years from God. We are together with Moshe Rabbeinu, face to face with God (cf. Numbers 12:8).

And it doesn't end there. It's not all "just because we're with him." Because at the end of the last forty days, Moshe Rabbeinu returned with an endless highway that is an endless skyway—the Torah. We usually think of Torah as being endless in its depth and breadth, but it is also endless because it reaches to protect even those "in the grave" (see *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #51 on Proverbs 6:22)—those who sleep with death-inducing ideas and behavior.

Regular, consistent, honest Torah study is the paved road we're looking for. It encourages us to keep going, it flashes warning signs and, being an endless skyway, the Torah provides safe alternate routes to get us to our destination, *teshuvah*, back to God.

Moshe Rabbeinu and the Patriarchs served God in spectacular fashion without having a Torah. In every era, even today, there are exceptional individuals who could serve God if there were no Torah. Then there are the rest of us. Who needs the Torah? We do.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Halakhot*,
Chakirut v'Kablanut 2:12

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SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman teaches: You can let out a scream in a room full of people and yet no one will hear it. This is the silent scream known as the "small still voice." Anyone can do this. Just imagine the sound of such a scream in your mind. When you picture this scream and focus your concentration on it, you are actually shouting inside your brain. It is not merely imagination, and it enables you to call out to God even in public (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #16)

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

21:10 When you go out to war against your enemies

The Evil Inclination Attempts To Fell A Person With Arrogance

Rebbe Nachman relates the Torah's account of going out to war to each person's battle with his own evil inclination:

"Your enemies"—this refers to the evil inclination.

"God your Lord delivers them into your hands"—this can also be translated as "they deliver God your Lord into your hands." In other words, the evil inclination tries to persuade a person that he has become a tzaddik, who can "rule over God" through his prayers (*Mo'ed Katan* 16b).

"And you take some of them captive"—a person can overpower the evil inclination by using that very thing with which it seeks to overpower him: arrogance. Our Sages state, "When a person is haughty, God says, 'I and he cannot dwell in the same world'" (*Sotah* 5a). One should practice humility instead, and respond to the evil inclination: "How can I rule when I am haughty, and God does not reside with me?" (LM I, 107).

22:2 Keep it with you until your brother asks for it

We Must Retrieve The Knowledge Of Our Mission On Earth

Our Sages teach that when an infant is in its mother's womb, it studies the entire Torah and is shown all that it must accomplish in this world. But when the infant is born, it forgets all that it had learned (*Niddah* 30b).

Every individual has forgotten, or lost, the knowledge of his mission in life, and he must seek to remember it. The tzaddik finds that which was lost. A person must therefore travel to the tzaddik to retrieve what he has lost. However, the tzaddik will not immediately turn it over to him. Instead, the tzaddik will test him to see that he is sincere in his desire for holiness and closeness to God (LM I, 188).

22:8 When you build a new house, make a railing for your roof

Guard Your Intellect

The Torah specifies a "new" house, even though the roofs of older houses also require a railing or fence to protect people from falling. The emphasis on "new" signifies that one's house should be used for renewal: within its walls, a person should continually strive to renew his commitment to Torah. To succeed, he should build a safeguard for his "roof"—i.e., his intellect. He must take care not to go beyond his limitations and capabilities. Otherwise, "the one who will stumble will fall from there" (LH VIII, p. 259a).

23:25 You may eat as many grapes as you like ... But do not put any into your basket

Overeating Can Harm A Person's Well-Being

When a person eats more than he needs, the excess food can be harmful to him.

Everything has a source from which it draws vitality. Foods get their vitality from a person's eating them—i.e., when one consumes food to sustain himself, the food itself is sustained by the person whom it has nourished. But when one eats more than he needs, the excess food has no one from whom to receive vitality, since the person has no need of it. It is as if the person put the excess food into a basket—it certainly will not receive vitality from there. Instead, the food seeks its vitality by drawing out the person's own vitality.

Thus, the verse states, "You may eat as many grapes as you like"—but not overeat (see

Bava Metzia 87b). "But do not put any into your basket"—for you have no need for it (LM I, 257).

24:15 His soul depends on it

Giving Charity Demonstrates Self-Sacrifice For God's Sake

A worker risks his very life to earn a living, such as by climbing up a steep staircase or suspending himself from a tree [to do his job] (Rashi).

A Jew sacrifices his soul every hour of every day. An example of this is when he gives his money to charity. Money is the soul, as the verse states: *Ve'eilav hu nosei et nafsho* (his soul depends on it), which literally means "he raises his soul for it." To earn money, a Jew first sacrifices his soul by struggling and even endangering himself for his livelihood. Yet afterwards, he takes the money and gives it away for the sake of God. It follows that he is sacrificing his soul (LM II, 46).

25:13 You should not have in your pouch two different weights ... Remember what Amalek did to you

To Overcome Amalek, We Must Do Business Honestly

The Jews were attacked by Amalek because they transgressed the laws of honest weights and measures (Rashi on Deuteronomy 25:17).

Engaging in honest business practices and annihilating Amalek are synonymous. Dishonesty, on the other hand, renders one susceptible to the *kelipah* of Amalek (LM I, 35:8).

The letters of the name *AMaLeK* (עמלק) can be rearranged to spell *MeUKaL* (מקול, crooked)—i.e., "crooked justice" (ibid., II, 5:11). Thus, Amalek represents falsehood and dishonesty (as well as immorality and foreign philosophies).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

15 — The Hidden Light (continued)

2. A person who wishes to experience a taste of the "hidden light" should spend much time in *hitbodedut* between himself and his Creator. He should evaluate and judge himself at all times—all his activities and

deeds—as to whether it is fitting and right for him to act and behave in this manner before God, Who constantly does favors for him at every moment. He should "order his affairs with judgment" (Psalms 112:5), coming in judgment on himself over everything he is doing, evaluating and judging himself on all of his activities and deeds.

By doing this, he will remove from himself all fears and be saved from "fallen fears." That is, he will not fear or be afraid of any officer, lord, wild animal, bandit or anything else in the world—but rather, he will fear and be afraid of God alone. In this way, he will elevate fear to its source, which is knowledge, and he will merit complete knowledge insofar as he knows what to fear—namely, the fear of the exaltedness of God's honored Name alone.

As a result of this knowledge, he will then attain an understanding of the Revealed Torah, which is integrally connected to the attribute of humility, and he will merit true humility. In turn, he will merit [by this humility] to pray with self-transcendence, whereby he will nullify all his selfhood and physicality when he prays, and he will pray without any interest in personal gain. He will not consider himself to be anything. Rather, he will nullify all his selfhood and physicality, and it will be as if he is not in the world at all, as it is written, "For You we are killed all day long" (Psalms 44:23). As a result of such prayer, he will comprehend the secrets of the Torah—which are the "hidden light" to be revealed in the future. And a person merits all this through *hitbodedut*.

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