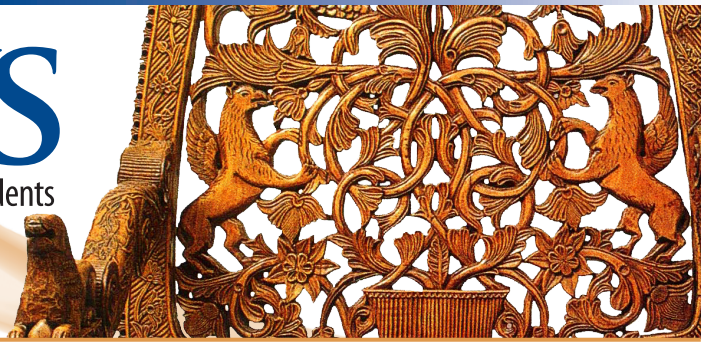


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Don't Let the Worms Get to You

By Ozer Bergman

“And every creeping thing that creeps on the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten” (Leviticus 11:41).

WARNING! YOU MAY NOT WANT TO READ THIS WHILE YOU ARE EATING.

Worms, insects and vermin manifest the essence of the poison and filth of the primordial Serpent in the Garden. They are the poison and filth. This is why they have height, even as animals have. They have no feet. They crawl on the ground—“on your belly you will go” (Genesis 3:14). More than any other creature they are mired in the dirt, the Serpent’s element. Their prohibition is so severe and they are forbidden a few times over because they are so disgusting and filthy, literally the Serpent’s scum. They horribly infect the soul because they are the reverse of the soul’s holiness.

Because they are so disgusting and vile, worms and vermin find their way into every sort of food and drink. They imbed themselves deeply and stick and stick and stick. It’s pure Serpent scum infesting all that’s sacred. They spoil whatever they enter, bringing decay and rot wherever they visit, to anything insufficiently unprotected. They are the lowest form of that sleazy lowlife, the damn fool Evil Inclination, his poison and filth. He swarms and infests anything holy, weighing a person down with depression and lethargy. Look how slow and heavy their motion is, how little vitality they have!

You have to be very careful to not let them get to your soul. The way this Evil Inclination swarms, sticks and infests—“Good Lord! There’s still more of them!”—makes them seem invincible. It’s not so. With a bit of foresight and strategy, attentiveness and initiative, they can be easily defeated. They’re weak, remember? At first, because they teem, it seems an impossible task, but just stay alert. The key is to nip them in the bud, to not let that first thought of laziness or apathy attach itself to your interest in a mitzvah, prayer or Torah study. One burst of energy to do—or think

or say—a mitzvah will kill thousands and thousands of Evil Inclination vermin.

Ah, but what if your mind has already begun to spoil, if the rot of despairing thoughts or the decay of lazy sentiment always make the first move and has become the “fruit” of your mind? REBUKE THEM! Don’t give them room to grow. Don’t give them any outward expression. In its incipient stage, it’s much easier to change a bad thought into good one. The trick is to not let it fester.

The prophet Elisha was so holy that a fly never came to his table (*Berachot* 10b). To benefit from his holiness, learn from the Shunamite woman. She prepared a place for him to lodge in her attic whenever he came to her town (II Kings 4:10). Make an “attic” for the tzaddik, a place for him in your mind. The more the refined, holy tzaddik occupies your mind, the less abominable, sleazy scummy vermin will.

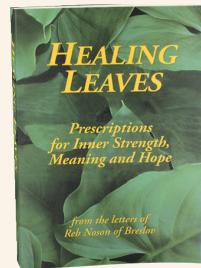
*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tolaim 1
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!
Originally Published 2011*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

Please, my son, look carefully at what your purpose is. Strengthen yourself in God’s Torah and apply yourself diligently to your studies. Set a time every day to seclude yourself with God in *hitbodedut*. Express clearly your words before Him. Beg Him and plead with Him to bring you to serve Him truly. Study Rebbe Nachman’s books until you know them by heart. There is no time like the present to study Torah and to pray, for “if not now, when?” (*Avot* 1:14). Our days are like a passing shadow and time rushes by. Nothing but the Torah, prayer and good deeds that you manage to seize each day will remain with you. Everything else is fleeting. (*Letter #5*)



Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Parashat Shemini enumerates many laws of kashrut, including how to tell which animals, fish and birds are kosher.

“You can eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud” (Leviticus 11:3).

The two signs of a kosher animal – split hooves and chews its cud – correspond to the qualities that can help a person return to God. A closed hoof represents a closed atmosphere, where nothing enters. A split hoof has an opening—i.e., an inner, tranquil atmosphere—which enters into and reigns, even in the lowest of levels (the feet or hooves). The chewing of the cud returns food that has descended into the animal's stomach back towards its head; this indicates that a person is returning to *da'at*—to intellect—rather than following his animalistic tendencies (*Likutey Halakhot* IV, p. 88-45a).

“You can eat anything that has fins and scales, whether in the water, the seas or the rivers” (Leviticus 11:9).

Tzaddikim are compared to fish; charity is compared to water. Unlike animals, which require *shechitah* (ritual slaughter), fish do not require *shechitah*. Symbolically, tzaddikim are pure and do not require a rectification, and charity is an act of purity symbolizing the rectification of the soul.

“Scales” refer to charity, which is like a suit of armor that protects a person. The word *tZaDdiK* (righteous person) comes from the same root as *tZeDaKah* (charity), connecting the concepts of purity and protection (*Likutey Halakhot* IV, p. 148-75a).

“These are the birds that you should avoid. You must not eat them; they are detestable: the eagle, the ossifrage and the osprey” (Leviticus 11:13).

If an egg is completely oval or completely round, it is from a non-kosher bird. If one end is curved while the other end is oval, it could be from a kosher bird. [Notwithstanding this sign,] we must have the testimony of a trapper who has a tradition that the bird that laid this egg is kosher, before we can eat it (*Yoreh Dei'ah* 85).

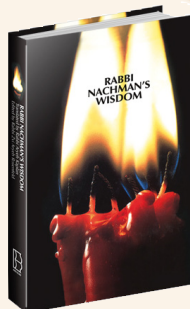
The round end of an egg represents humility. The oval or “sharp” end of an egg represents boldness and brazenness. A kosher egg is a combination of round and oval, alluding to the Jew who acts humbly before those who are God-fearing, yet stands up boldly to those who try to obstruct his devotions to God (*Likutey Halakhot* IV, p. 180).

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

22. It is very good to be worthy of being close to a true tzaddik.

Regarding the Messianic age, it is written, “The ends of the earth will be grasped and the wicked will be shaken from it” (Job 38:13). However, one who is attracted to a true tzaddik can hold on to him and not be cast off. Holding on to the tzaddik, he can remain firm.



23. The Rebbe said that in the World to Come, many people will be left outside. They will cry in a bitter voice, “Give us something to eat!”

People will come to them and say, “Here is food and water. Eat! Drink!” But those outside will answer, “No! No! We cannot use such food. What we need is the food of Torah and devotion.”

Other people will be left outside, naked. They, too, will cry, “Give us something to cover ourselves with!” Again people will come to them and say, “Here is some clothing.” But they will also reply, “No! Such clothing is absolutely useless to us. We need *mitzvot* and good deeds to cover ourselves with.”

The Rebbe then said, “Fortunate is he who is worthy of eating many chapters of Mishnah, drinking a number of Psalms, and clothing himself with some good deeds.”



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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.