



Breslov Shavuot Booklet
Rebbe Nachman's Torah on Shavuot

Shavuot: Our Personal “Giving of the Torah”
By Yossi Katz

INTRODUCTION

After many years of bitter bondage in Egypt, the poor Hebrew slaves emerge victorious and triumphant over their Egyptian slave masters. As they make their way through the desert, they approach Mount Sinai and the purpose of Creation, where the lowest of the low rise to become God’s chosen people.

Moses delivers God’s question to the Hebrews: “Will you accept the Torah and thereby become a treasure among the nations?” They answer, “All that God has spoken, we will do.” Moses then brought the people’s reply to God. God then informs Moses that He will appear to him and the people will hear what He says. But then we read one of the most mysterious verses in the Torah: “Moses related the people’s reply to God.” But where was the question, and what was the answer? The Torah does not reveal this to us (see Exodus 19).

In *Likutey Moharan* I, 190, Rebbe Nachman explains what was going on behind the scenes. When the Israelites replied, “All that God has spoken, *we will do*,” they were actually objecting to God’s question. If God outright tells us what to do, how can we possibly maintain our free will? “We will” have to “do” it. Moses brings this question before God.

God replies that He will appear to Moses specifically and address the commandments to him alone; the Jewish people will hear them only as bystanders, thus retaining their freedom of choice.

But then Moses asks, “What about me and my freedom of choice?” This is the meaning of the second occurrence of “Moses related the people’s reply to God,” where the question and answer were not recorded by the Torah. Rebbe Nachman reveals that Moses was repeating the Jewish people’s objection, but this time about himself!

God responds, “Go to the Jewish people and sanctify them today and tomorrow” (and then the Torah will be given). God did not specify explicitly that three days of preparation were necessary in order to receive the Torah; Moses had to grasp this on his own and command the Jewish people to add the extra day (see *Shabbat* 87a for Moses’ calculation). Remarkably, this means that even the giving of the Torah was contingent on Moses’ free will.

PART I

Where does this leave us? Are we tzaddikim who are on a level where we have both the ability and need to grasp God’s hidden will? Reb Noson says, “Yes.” Even though the Torah has already been given and the *mitzvot* are known to us, we need good advice and ideas to fulfill the commandments in the best possible way. We also need to find our individual paths within Judaism, and we need to attach ourselves to the proper teacher/Tzaddik. All of this has to be done on our own.

Reb Noson adds that if we concentrate on our eternal purpose, we will discover the hints along the way that lead us to our own personal “giving of the Torah.” Amen.

Based on Likutey Halachot Birkhat HaShachar 5

PART II

Until now, we discussed the part of each one of us that is considered to be a “tzaddik.” But we can also understand that Rebbe Nachman was also referring to himself as a tzaddik. A few of Rebbe Nachman’s statements relating to this lesson in the book *Tzaddik* will shed a lot of light in this regard.

Tzaddik #94

Monday, 24th Iyar. Uman.

The Rebbe told me that at this stage he really wished he could throw off the burdens of the world from his shoulders. He wished he could find someplace where he could live all alone without having to bear the yoke of his responsibilities to his followers and so on. He said even if he had never become a leader he thought he would still have been able to attain what he did. I pointed out that Moses also undertook the role of leader in order to bring people closer to God. And surely Moses went wrong here, replied the Rebbe, because even he was punished for attempting to bring the mixed multitude closer.

The Rebbe went on: The hard part of anything a person has to do for God is the part that is left to his own free will. The things he has to decide for himself without being explicitly commanded or asked to do. Then it is entirely up to him to do as he chooses. This is the concept of the day Moses added on his own initiative... (see above)

The Rebbe said that when it came to God’s manifest desire there was no task or devotion in the world he ever found an effort or a burden in any way at all. No matter how much suffering might be involved, and the Rebbe knew very well what suffering meant, he would accept it easily if he knew without doubt that this was the will of the Creator. If this was God’s will, he would willingly accept anything. Neither suffering nor anything else would be the slightest burden for him.

For the Rebbe, the main difficulty lay in the realm where it was left to him to choose, as with the day Moses added on his own initiative where no explicit command was given. Here the Rebbe did not know how to act. There were times when things he decided to do came very hard for him. He suffered greatly and afterwards he still did not know if he had been doing what God wanted...

Clearly he felt assailed with doubts and he could not decide what to do. He was wondering whether he should cast off the burden of leadership seeing as the gains were not as great as he had wanted.

I've already spoken about this in the past, the Rebbe said. It takes time and energy to help the living. Even if you try to help a Tzaddik here in this world to raise him up and bring him to a higher level it is hard work, far harder than helping and raising up thousands upon thousands of souls belonging to departed sinners. In this world people have free will and that is why it is very hard to get anywhere with them as it means stripping them of their freedom so as to lead them to the true path. It is different with the dead. Someone may have been the greatest sinner, but as soon as he is dead you can do whatever you want with him: whatever you tell him to do he will do, no matter how evil he was. On the other hand, if you work with even a great Tzaddik, as long as he is still in his body he has free will. It is very hard to achieve anything with him so as to draw him from his present ways and bring him to the truth .

Editor's note: By his own account the Rebbe was very occupied with rectifying countless thousands of souls which had fallen long ago. This was his main task, and for this reason he wondered if he should not cast off his role as leader completely. If he hesitated it was because there was no doubt that if he could help someone with free will to come back to God it was of incalculable value.

After this, the Rebbe spoke about his being in Uman, saying it was a very good place for him. If he wanted to be anywhere it was best for him to be here. And when his days were ended, this would be a place for him to die, because of the tremendous massacre in Uman...

Then I said to the Rebbe: Surely if you help a living person who does have free will it is a very worthwhile accomplishment. Certainly, the Rebbe replied and by his gesture and expression he indicated that it was an achievement of inestimable worth. It goes without saying. What you forget is how time consuming it is. There was no doubt how valuable it was to accomplish something with a free agent. But working with him took so much time, and even then it was still an open question whether one would succeed, because of the difficulty helping a person with free will. The same time could be used to elevate countless thousands of dead souls. This was why the Rebbe had such doubts, and it was here that he had to make his own choice, because there was no clear directive. For him, this was a question of, the day Moses added on his own initiative .

It had evidently occurred to the Rebbe to go off and leave us, but it was hard for him to do so because he was looking forward to Rosh HaShanah so much. The whole summer in Uman he was longing for the moment he would be with his assembled followers for Rosh HaShanah. And God in His tender mercy took pity on us and on all Israel, and the Rebbe did not leave us. He stayed with us the whole summer and for Rosh HaShanah, and we heard the most outstanding lesson from him that last Rosh HaShanah. It was in Uman that he died, and his immortal presence is with us forever. How can I repay God for all His bountiful dealings toward me? (cf. Psalms 116:12).

I heard from one of the Rebbes followers in Ladizin that when the Rebbe visited Ladizin at the start of his illness and predicted that it would take his life, he spoke a little about his grave and said: I want to remain among you - *Ich vill bleiben tzvishen eich*. And you should come to my grave.

Editor's note: To me it was very precious to hear that the Rebbe had said, quite explicitly: I want to remain among you. The entire world depends on this.

If we analyze Rebbe Nachman's hints and Reb Noson's comments, I believe the Rebbe's true intention becomes obvious. The Rebbe wanted very much to do what was apparent and "easy" for him: to rectify the souls of Jews who had already passed. For Rebbe Nachman, helping living Jews was time consuming and achieved unpredictable results. Yet he willingly accepted this role to help his fellow Jews and suffered greatly because of this, especially because he never knew if it was truly God's desire. And he persevered with every ounce of strength until the very end.

But it didn't end there, as Reb Noson clearly points out. When the Rebbe was first stricken with tuberculosis and it became known to him that he would not be able to continue in this world, he said, "I want to remain among you."

The Rebbe was clearly proclaiming for eternity: Despite my passing to the next world, I will continue helping every single Jew.

May we merit attaching ourselves to this great Tzaddik, Amen.

The Fiftieth Gate – Prayers That Pertain to Shavuot ***Likutey Tefilot I, 56***

Help us and deliver us, so that we may purify and sanctify ourselves at all times by immersing in the *mikvah*. Thus, may we cleanse ourselves of all forms of impurity – all sins, transgressions, and iniquities that we have committed before You, from our youth until today, and elicit great holiness through the *mikvah*.

Confer upon us higher consciousness and abundant mercy in the merit of immersing in the *mikvah*; and grant us the power to mitigate all harsh judgments against us, our offspring, and the entire House of Israel by immersing in the *mikvah*. Remove all afflictions, cancel all evil decrees, and constantly save us through the holy and awesome *mikvah*, in fulfillment of the verse, “O Hope (*Mikvah*) of Israel, its Redeemer in a time of distress...”

Grant us the privilege of drawing upon ourselves the holiness of the *mikvah* of Shavuot, which commemorates the Giving of Your Torah – when Israel came close to You, and were deemed worthy to receive the holy Torah through immersing in the *mikvah*. On Shavuot, may we all be granted the merit of being cleansed in the Supernal Mikvah: the *mikvah* of the Fiftieth Gate of Holiness, which is great and eternal mercy, sublime loving-kindness, and highly exalted consciousness.

Enable us to transmit the holiness of this *mikvah* of Shavuot to the entire year. May we purify and sanctify ourselves constantly, exit all Fifty Gates of Impurity, and enter the Fifty Gates of Holiness. As it is written, “I will sprinkle upon you pure water, that you may be cleansed; and from your contamination and from all of your idols, I will purify you!”

Rabbi Ephraim ben Naftali, Tefilot HaBoker

Master of the Universe! Give me the privilege of going to a kosher mikveh every day and immersing before prayer. By immersing in the mikveh, may I draw upon myself higher consciousness and overflowing kindness from Above, the source of which is the mikveh of Shavuot. Thus, may the holy attribute of Malkhut / Kingship attain true perfection: through the mikveh of Shavuot, which is supernal kindness and abundant mercy.

All this we may draw upon ourselves by virtue of the Torah of the true tzaddikim. Through their holy teachings, we can imbue ourselves with supernal kindness and knowledge, until we will perceive that You are present within all concealments. Thus, we will leave all places of concealment, and truly realize that You reign supreme over the entire world, and Your kingship extends over all; as it is written, “God is King forever and ever; the nations have perished from His land.”

May we be privileged to make known Your faith and Your sovereignty from generation to generation -- that “Your kingdom extends over all worlds, and Your dominion from generation to generation” — and to bring others back in perfect teshuvah. “For God is good, His kindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness is from generation to generation. God will rule forever,” amen and amen!