

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Sign Language

By Ozer Bergman

“God sent poisonous snakes... They bit people and many died... The people came to Moshe and confessed, ‘We sinned by speaking against God and against you. Pray on our behalf that God remove the snakes from us.’ Moshe prayed on the people’s behalf and God said to him, ‘Make yourself a statue of a snake and place it on a pole. Anyone bitten by a snake will look at it and live.’ Moshe cast a snake out of copper and placed it on a pole. If a snake bit someone, the person would look at the copper snake and live” (Numbers 21:6-9).

“Did the snake kill or give life?! No, but when the Jews looked up and enslaved their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed; if not, they wasted away” (*Rosh HaShanah* 3:8).

This incident with the snakes didn’t take place in a vacuum; it took place in a desert. When I say desert, I mean that the Clouds of Glory, which had surrounded and protected the Jewish people, disappeared with the demise of Aharon HaKohen (Aaron the Priest), the champion of peace (see *Avot* 1:12). The Jews were exposed and vulnerable. Amalek, their arch-enemy, wasted no time in launching an attack (Numbers 20:28-21:1).

Of an earlier battle with Amalek, the Torah tells us, “When Moshe raised his hand, the Jews prevailed, but when he lowered it, Amalek prevailed (Exodus 17:11). The Mishnah asks, “Did Moshe’s hands make or break the war? No, but when the Jews looked up and enslaved their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would prevail; if not, they fell” (*Rosh HaShanah*, *ibid.*).

This Mishnah is teaching us about two levels of non-verbal communication that a teacher may use to communicate with a student. The first, more subtle level can be used when the student is in a receptive mood. With a gesture, the teacher can indicate a lesson that words cannot transmit. Rebbe Nachman calls these lessons *remazim b'daat*, hints and allusions that must be transmitted without words because one must fathom certain aspects of connecting with the Divine on one’s own.

An example of the second level of *remazim b'daat* appears in this week’s *parashah*. There are certain times and situations where a person is so weak that a gesture alone is not enough to strengthen his resolve for staying connected to the Torah. He needs something concrete to “put the fear of God” in him,

to drive home the point that the King’s orders must be obeyed. Enter the snakes.

Rebbe Nachman explains, “Without *yirat ha-onesh* (fear of punishment), it’s utterly impossible to begin to serve God. Even tzaddikim need *yirat ha-onesh*. Those whose service of God is based solely on love are few and far between. The main thing is *yirat ha-onesh*” (*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom* #5). Yes, it’s true – Rebbe Nachman himself points this out – the ideal is to serve God out of awe and reverence. However, as Reb Noson writes, “The truth is, we would be quite fortunate if our *yirat ha-onesh* would help us to avoid what we need to avoid!” (*Hilkhot Netilat Yedaim* 6:99).

At the time of the second battle, the Jews were weakened by the loss of Aharon HaKohen’s example. Instead of understanding that the loss of Aharon HaKohen and the Clouds of Glory called for more effort on their part to live up to the ideals of love and understanding that Aharon HaKohen had personified, they assumed the worst about God and Moshe Rabbeinu (!) and spoke negatively about them (Numbers 21:5). This brought about the invasion of the snakes.

Being punished is not necessarily something to be upset about. On the contrary. If one admits and tries to correct his mistake(s), he may gain both physical and spiritual strength (*Or HaChaim HaKodesh* on Numbers 21:8-9).

Based on *Likutey Halakhot*, *Hilkhot Netilat Yedaim* 6:99

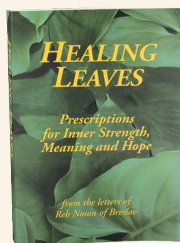
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

This is a reprint

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



The truth is that nothing in the world is ever beyond hope. Even if, God forbid, a strong edict has already been decreed against a person, still, through many prayers and good deeds and never giving up, he can arouse God’s compassion to effect a complete reversal. (*Letter* #88)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

In an original teaching, Rebbe Nachman reads the first three words of Deuteronomy 19:14, "Zot HaTorah Adam – This is the Torah, a man" as a complete thought, prompting many chiddushim on the topic.

Man corresponds to the Torah. The Hebrew word for "man," *ADaM*, is composed of the letters *aleph*, *dalet*, *mem*.

Aleph means "study," indicating the Torah.

Dalet has the numerical value of 4, referring to the four elements of fire, air, water and earth. These constitute the material composition of man, which can be subjugated to the soul.

The final *mem* corresponds to the World to Come, because the final *mem* is a closed letter, indicating the unseen Future.

With Torah, a person can transcend his physicality and attain the World to Come (*Likutey Moharan I*, 37:3).

* * *

Just as mankind consists of various types—e.g., wealthy and poor—so too, the Torah has all sorts of applications, lenient and strict (ibid. I, 13:5). Only when a person fulfills all of the *mitzvot* of the Torah is he called a complete "man."

* * *

Just as a person can write the letters of the Torah on a piece of parchment, turning that parchment into a Torah scroll, so too, one can transform himself into a Torah scroll. By inscribing the letters of Torah upon himself—i.e., by continually speaking words of Torah and holiness—a person can turn his body into a receptacle of Torah and holiness (*Likutey Halakhot I*, p. 470).

* * *

Each Jew is like a book of Torah. The more Jews who exist in the world, the more Torah is revealed. And the more Torah books that are published and revealed in the world, the greater degree of clarity we can gain for observing the Torah (ibid. III, p. 236a).

This explains why it is a great mitzvah for couples to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28)—for by having children, they cause the revelation of more Torah in the world.

* * *

There are "chambers of Torah" that a person can enter and then walk through, strolling from room to room—that is to say, from idea to idea, whether those of others or his own. Yet he may never get to the core of the Torah itself.

By way of analogy, one can write the word "man," draw a picture of a man, or sculpt a figure of a man. But none of these is an actual human being. So too, the Torah is manifested in various degrees. But one must strive to attain the actual Torah. This is why the verse states: "This is the Torah, a man." We must attain the Torah that is as real as an actual man (*Likutey Moharan I*, 245).

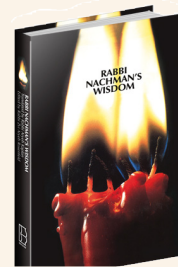
SIDEPATH

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

39. You should be able to feel another's troubles in your own heart. This is especially true when many are suffering.

When an entire community is in distress, you should surely feel its agony in your heart. If you do not feel it, you should strike your head against the wall. Meaning, you should strike your head against the walls of your heart.

40. We have often discussed the prohibition against having anything at all to do with philosophical works. This even includes philosophical works of the great rabbis. We believe that God created and sustains the world, and will restore it in the future. For this we do not need philosophy.



It appears that many people are drawn to philosophy, yet have no interest in such fascinating Kabbalistic works as the *Zohar* and the writings of the Ari. People seek wisdom, yet ignore these sacred works filled with ideas that are sweeter than honey and enlighten the eyes.

A favorite subject of the philosophers is the order of creation. They may ask why a star is worthy of being a star, or a constellation a constellation, while other things are consigned to a lower realm. Or they may ask why animals are not given man's faculties. Why not the other way around? Or they may ask why the head is what it is and not a foot.

Questions like these are all vanity and striving after wind. For God is just and righteous, and one cannot question His reasons.



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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.