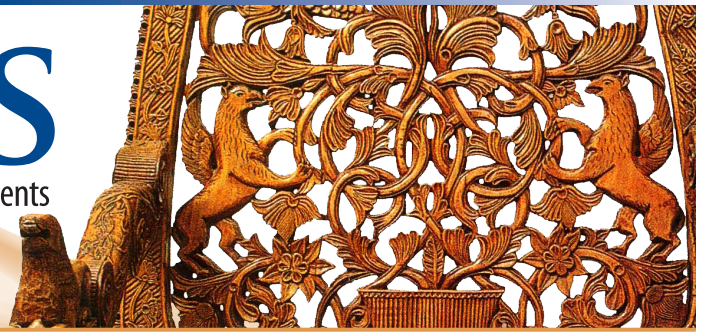


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Light-Years Apart

By Ozer Bergman

“The first of what you shear from your sheep, give to [the Kohen]” (Deuteronomy 18:4).

When we think sheep (if we ever do), most of us might call to mind Little Bo Peep and the ones she lost. When we think wool, we think suits, sweaters and blankets. What connection can we make between this mitzvah and our non-farming lives?

On the verse “Your hair is like that of a flock of goats” (Song of Songs 4:1, 6:5), Rashi comments: God says to the Jewish people, “Even the empty ones among you are precious to Me,” and “There is much to praise even in the weak and scrawny ones among you.” The “woolen hairs” that God finds by a Jew are very precious to Him. What are they and why are they so precious?

“Where will you rest them in the hot afternoon?” (Song of Songs 1:7) – this is the hot afternoon of exile” (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:7:2). In the “hot afternoon” of exile, when Jews are enslaved to pay taxes to promote the interests of heathens, when Jews are enslaved and think like their gentile masters, how can they possibly rest and gather their strength to observe God’s Torah and mitzvot the way they should?

It’s well-nigh impossible. Each and every one of us is fighting an uphill battle and, frankly, most of us are taking a licking. Yet each of us tries hard and succeeds, somewhat, to inch forward, to budge a little, to come a hairsbreadth closer to God, by rejecting the selfishness, the grabbing at the fleeting pleasures of this world, in favor of giving of himself to God.

“But what’s it worth? How much did I really accomplish?” There are two answers (at least) to this question. First, each hairsbreadth is cumulative. One by one, they add up and become a gift worthy of God’s praise, endearing that scrawny little goat (you!) to the Blessed Creator (as above). The second answer is provided by the following:

Rebbe Nachman once told a story about a melancholy tzaddik who wanted to make himself happy, but found it impossible to do so. No matter what he thought of to make himself happy, Satan (the Evil Inclination) would point out to him why, in fact, that thing was not a reason to be happy.

Finally the tzaddik found something that was unassailable: God had not made him a heathen.

He started to dwell on this thought and it made him happier and happier. He became so happy, he was as happy as Moses at the time he received the Tablets! The tzaddik was so uplifted that he was traveling light-years in the spiritual worlds. He was concerned that when he descended, he would be so far from home that people would discover that he was a tzaddik. He did not want that.

Joy has a limit, beginning and ending automatically. It ends little by little and so, too, the tzaddik descended little by little. When he landed, he was no more than a hairsbreadth away from where he had taken off. The distance was so slight that only God could measure it!

How did the tzaddik move so far spiritually when physically, he had moved almost not at all?

The Rebbe reminds us of the geometric fact that two lines that begin at the same point move further and further away from one another the more they move away from the starting point. Where you are before you begin moving, and your spiritual state then, are two endpoints of one “line”; where you are after you’ve moved, and your spiritual state now, are two endpoints of a different “line.” In this world, they’re very close, but spiritually, they’re light-years apart!

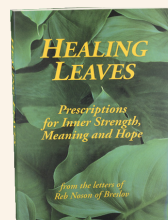
*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Reishit HaGez 4:1, 2
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

Anyone and everyone, relative to what he feels and knows in his heart, can find himself marveling and trembling in amazement at the ever-fresh, ever-renewed shining of the truth of our holy belief in the Life of life, in the Unique, Ancient and Eternal God, may His Blessed Name be exalted forever. He created with lovingkindness everything that exists. Belief in God can fill anyone with fresh energy and life, no matter what level he is on. (Letter #43)



Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

Judgment – of others and of ourselves – is a major theme in this week's parashah.

“Appoint for yourselves judges and officers in all your cities”
(Deuteronomy 16:18).

When there is no judgment below, there is judgment Above (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:4). If we ignore our obligation to set up a system of justice on earth, then God uses His own system of judgment. All things become His messengers for executing His judgment, instilling clear and pure fear in us. But when we do set up a justice system and judge ourselves, we obviate the need for Heaven to instill fear in us and, consequently, we fear no one and nothing but God.

On an individual level, each person can constantly elevate his fear of Heaven by practicing *hitbodedut*. During this daily private conversation with God, he should judge and evaluate every one of his actions – past and present – to determine if they were carried out properly. He should also evaluate his future intentions to see if they are appropriate. One who engages in self-judgment need not fear anything – the authorities, thieves, or anything else that causes him to be afraid – only God Himself (*Likutey Moharan* I, 15:2).

* *

“Bribery blinds the eyes of the wise” (Deuteronomy 16:19).

The clouds that cover a person's eyes, spiritually obscuring his sight, correspond to the kelipot that stop the prayers from ascending (*Tikkuney Zohar* #21, 50b).

Judgment is in the eyes. That is to say, a person judges in accordance with how he sees an issue.

When judgment is blemished – when the eyes are “clouded” – then one's vision of Godliness is also impaired, and he is liable to be distracted by foreign thoughts during prayer. By giving charity, especially before praying, he can rectify judgment and his prayers will flow unhindered (*Likutey Moharan* I, 2:5).

* *

“A case must stand on the testimony of two witnesses”
(Deuteronomy 19:15).

The “two witnesses” symbolize truth and faith. Alternately, they correspond to *tefillin* and circumcision, or to Shabbat and circumcision (*Likutey Halachot* VII, p. 10-12).

SIDEPATH

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

54. God does not do the same thing twice. Even when a soul is reincarnated, it is not completely the same.



The soul has a level of *nefesh* and a level of *ruach*, and the two are never brought back in the same combination. A *nefesh* may be reincarnated, but always with a different *ruach*. The complete soul is not the same, for God does not do the same thing twice.

55. The Rebbe once spoke of the good one earns in the World to Come through serving God. He said that we call this reward “good” because there is no other word in human language to describe it. But it is really so much higher than any concept of good that the word is totally inadequate.

56. You may think that you are removed from a particular major temptation, such as the desire for wealth. Still, you may be much worse off than someone else who is steeped in that desire, because you may be so deeply involved in another desire that it totally overshadows even the desire for riches. Having a desire that can completely overwhelm another desire surely makes you much worse off.

A stubborn infant can literally strike his head against the wall to spite his mother. There are some people who exhibit the same stubbornness and lack of self-control. They give up every pleasure because of some stubborn, overpowering desire.



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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.