

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Poor Man's Offering

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF THE greatest gifts that Chassidic teachings impart to us is the ability to illuminate and make relevant all parts of Torah, even the seemingly obscure ones. The teachings of Rebbe Nachman and Reb Noson make the Torah come alive, helping us find answers and life advice in verses of the Torah that cynics claim are irrelevant and archaic. These incredible teachings reinforce our belief in the profound depth and truth of the Torah and its authentic interpreters, the Tzaddikim.

One such idea that seems to be “out of date” is the idea of animal sacrifices. The Torah states, “When a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to God, from animals...” (Leviticus 1:2). Rebbe Nachman shines a beautiful light on one of the lessons that we can glean from the Temple sacrifices even today:

When people want to become truly religious and serve God, they seem to be overwhelmed with confusion and frustrations. They find great barriers in their path and cannot decide what to do. The more they want to serve God, the more difficulty they encounter.

All the enthusiasm that such people have when trying to do good is very precious, even if their goal is not achieved. All their effort is counted like a sacrifice... You may wish to perfect and sanctify yourself, but find yourself unable to do so. Still, the effort and suffering involved in the frustrated attempt are not in vain. They are all an offering to God...

Therefore, always do your part, making every effort to serve God to the best of your ability... Do everything in your ability, and God will do what is good in His eyes (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #12).

Reb Noson elaborates on this idea by illuminating one of the laws of the *Minchah* offering. The *Minchah* offering is often brought by the poor, who cannot afford the price of an animal; they are instructed to bring an offering of flour instead. Yet when referring to the one who brings this

offering, the Torah calls him a “soul” rather than a “man.” Rashi explains that it is as if God is saying, “I consider it as if he has sacrificed his very soul!”

One may never assume, God forbid, that because of all his shortcomings and errors, he cannot come close to God. On the contrary! Just like the poor man who can't bring an expensive animal, he can still gather together a few pennies and offer flour. God values the sincere offering of the pauper – whether he lacks materially or spiritually.

Our Rabbis teach that today our prayers are in place of the sacrifices and Temple offerings. When someone feels his physicality and smallness before God and pours out his heart before his Father in Heaven – even if it seems he can't concentrate properly or have the right intentions – that prayer has great value on high. “He has neither despised nor abhorred the cry of the poor, neither has He hidden His face from him; and when he cried out to Him, He heard” (Psalms 22:25).

The main thing is for us to act humbly, pouring forth our sincerest thoughts and desires in conversation with God. Then, despite whatever personal shortcomings we have, God will turn to us wherever we are. Furthermore, these prayers that are offered from a position of distance and lowliness are most valued and potent. May we all merit to bring the poor man's offering – today!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefillat Minchah 7

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Man was created in order to know God – and for this it is well worth enduring all the toil of this world. What is more, the very fact that a person knows and believes this lightens his labor and enables him to turn everything into joy! (Letter #474)

Wiping the Slate Clean

By Yehudis Golshevsky

TO AN OUTSIDE observer, the ferocity of the opponents of Breslover Chasidim – and especially of Reb Noson – is hard to fathom. As one person put it, “So they decided not to take a new rebbe after Rebbe Nachman passed away. Why did that warrant being attacked and treated like the worst criminals?”

Reb Noson was actually forced to flee his home and wander around for most of the winter of 1865. He returned home just before Rosh Chodesh Nisan. His opponents worked overtime to ensure that Reb Noson had no peace of mind even after his return, bribing the authorities to set up a military boot factory in Reb Noson’s own home. Non-Jewish workers filled the main room with foul-smelling hides and also ate their meals there, making it impossible to clean for Pesach.

The night before Pesach, Reb Noson made the blessing over the search for *chametz*, having in mind this time that just as the *chametz* must be removed, so should the boot factory. The next day, his supporters finally convinced the authorities to remove the factory, and the workers packed up and left. People were hired to get the house ready for the holiday.

That night, Reb Noson conducted the *Seder* with his usual enthusiasm, serenity and joy. During the meal, his family began to talk about the hardships they had endured that winter, with the head of their family absent from their lives.

Then they began speaking about the wickedness of his opponents. Reb Noson stopped them, saying: “It is now *Seder* night. The Jewish people worked so hard to prepare for this special night.” He enumerated every aspect of preparation one must make for the holiday and added, “All this they do solely for the honor of Pesach. Clearly, it is forbidden to speak ill of any Jew.

“Let us instead consider how much pleasure God takes in every effort that each of His children make in honor of this precious holiday. Think how important every Jew is, that our every effort is so special; our work and every extra penny that we spend affects all the worlds.”

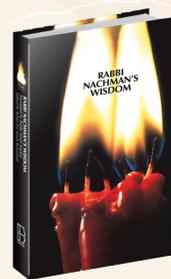
In this manner, Reb Noson helped his family let go of their resentments and open their hearts to the illumination that descends on this special night.

Based on Shaarey Tzaddik III, 158-159

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l

215. The Rebbe said, “For me, the main thing is Rosh HaShanah. Right after Rosh HaShanah, I begin listening very carefully. I want to hear them knocking on the wall, waking people for next year’s *Selichot*. For the year passes and is gone in the blink of an eye.”



216. In his commentary on the Book of Proverbs, the *Alshikh* writes at length about avoiding philosophical works. In a wonderfully clear manner, he explains how they fool the world. At first, they conceal their false beliefs and skepticism, displaying only the facade of sweetness of their evil ways.

It is written, “The lips of a forbidden woman drip honey...but her end is as bitter as wormwood” (Proverbs 5:3-4). Rashi comments that this “forbidden woman” is atheism. There are two women in the Book of Proverbs – the “woman of valor” (*ibid.*, 31:10), representing the Torah, and the “foreign woman,” representing secular wisdom.

If you know the ways of the “enlighteners,” you know how they mislead people. Most of all, they mislead the young by teaching them their bitter ways. They are literally like the libertine woman. At first, she adorns herself and speaks sweetly, not revealing the evil in her heart. She pretends to be virtuous, not revealing her true nature until she snares her prey. This is also the evil way of these “enlighteners,” as is obvious to all who are familiar with them.



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641
P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.