

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Food for Thought

From The Breslov Haggadah

HALAKHMA ANYA – This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, come and eat! All who are in need, come and join in celebrating Pesach! This year we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel! This year we are slaves, next year we will be free men! (Passover Haggadah)

This is the Bread of Poverty! Of material poverty and affliction. Of spiritual poverty and cynicism. It is the bread our ancestors ate in bondage.

This bread, the *very same* bread, is the Bread of Redemption! We brought it out of Egypt, it tasted like Bread from Heaven. The bread did not change. Our awareness of its Source did!

The morning after the Seder. The long prayer service had just ended. Everyone was still dizzy from the wine, exhausted from the long night. But it was great. Another Seder! Another Pesach! Everyone was elated. Everyone except one.

“I’m glad that’s over with,” he grumbled. “I just can’t take all that wine, and the Matzah gives me constipation. And what’s the need to say all that Haggadah? Can’t the rabbis take us into consideration? Oh well, it’ll be over in a week. Before you know it, we’ll be back to routine.”

Stunned by the outburst, the others looked on in consternation. No one wanted to embarrass him, but no one knew how to approach him. Looking at him in silence, they all sighed.

What a pity. For him it was just another Seder... just another Pesach...

Two people can externally experience the same event. The one who is spiritually impoverished will perceive affliction and suffering. Internally he will taste the dryness of a Godless experience. The one who is aware of the Source of all events will perceive Benevolent Providence. He will gain insight into God’s Infinite Unity, and see how it is expressed through the multitude of human events and worldly phenomena.

This is the “Bread of Experience.” It’s a matter of taste.

We call out to those who are still grappling in the exile of spiritual poverty: Come! Let us partake of the Bread of Experience. Let us together learn how to “eat,” how to taste life, to experience God throughout. It may still be painful, but next year in the Land of Israel! It is only a matter of time. Next year we will experience true freedom.

Throughout the year, the physical reality of our bread is Chametz – leavened, fermented bread. It is indicative of – indeed, it is the cause of – the fermentation of our thoughts. What we eat and *how* we eat it influences our mental processes. Eating just for pleasure or the alleviation of hunger is beneath the level of man. Our thought processes sink below human level and we fall prey to undesirable fantasies.

We must therefore *break* those spontaneous thoughts the moment we become aware of them. We must not allow them to *rise* to our human consciousness. Year-round, we recite a blessing first, and only then partake of our food. Through the blessing, we become aware of the higher meaning of human consumption. Then we can “break bread” – break off those unwanted thoughts.

On Pesach, we eat Matzah. Unfermented bread, unfermented thoughts. It is symbolic of true human consumption. We break it even before a blessing is recited. We show that with “Matzah,” we can abruptly break off undesired thoughts and keep our minds pure.

“This is the Bread of Declaration!” – our food for thought.

Through the Lechem Oni, the broken bread, we come to its second aspect: The Bread of Declaration. By harnessing our eating habits – by harnessing our thought processes – we can express ourselves before God. We are free of disturbing thoughts. Now we can sit down to the Seder to recount, experience and declare the wonders of the Redemption.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Betziat HaPat 3:2-3
Pesach kasher v’samei’ach! A happy and kosher Passover*

A Passover Parable

By Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Rebbe Nachman told the following parable:

ONCE A JEW and a German gentile were traveling together as hobos. The Jew told the German to make believe that he was a Jew (since his language was similar [to Yiddish]), and the Jews would have pity on him.

Since Pesach was approaching, the Jew taught him how to act (when he is invited to a Seder). He told him that at every Seder, Kiddush is made and the hands are washed. However, he forgot to tell him about the bitter herb.

The German was invited to a house on the first night of Pesach and, being very hungry from all day, looked forward to the fine foods that had been described by the Jew. First they gave him a piece of celery dipped in salt water, and other things served at the Seder. They then began to recite the Haggadah, and he sat there longing for the meal. When the matzah was served, he was very happy.

Then they gave him a piece of horseradish for the bitter herb. It was bitter to taste, and he thought that this was the entire meal. He ran from the house, bitter and hungry, saying to himself, "Cursed Jews! After all that ceremony, that's all they serve to eat!" He went to the synagogue where he had made up to meet his partner, and fell asleep.

After a while the Jew arrived, happy and full from a good meal. "How was your Seder?" he asked.

The other told him what had happened.

"Stupid German!" replied the Jew. "If you had waited just a little longer, you would have had a fine meal, as I had."

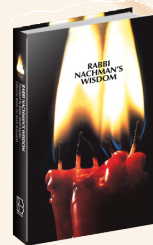
The same is true when one wants to come close to God. After all the effort to begin, one is given a little bitterness. This bitterness is needed to purify the body. But a person may think that this bitterness is all there is to serving God, so he runs away from it. But if he waited a short while and allowed his body to be purified, then he would feel every joy and delight in the world in his closeness to God.

Rabbi Nachman's Stories, Parable #23

SIDEPATH

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

218. There were some "enlightened" people who claimed that the moon contained life like that on earth. They said they could see trees and other terrestrial creatures on the moon. The Rebbe ridiculed this greatly, saying it is absolute foolishness. The moon is like a mirror. The things people claim to see on the moon are actually reflections of things here on earth.



219. During his last years, the Rebbe constantly spoke of faith. As we understood him, everything he said was meant to bring true faith into every Jewish heart. Many times, the Rebbe would remind us of the great favor that Moses did us by beginning the Torah with the simple words, "In the beginning, God created Heaven and earth" (Genesis 1:1). He revealed our faith without any sophistication or philosophy.

220. The Rebbe once told someone, "I will tell you a secret. Great atheism is coming to the world. Atheism will come to the world as a test from on high. I know that my followers will be strong and remain firm in their faith without this, but I am revealing this to further encourage them. Let them know that this has already been predicted."

The Rebbe's words came true. Immediately after his death, atheism spread in the world as never before since the beginning of time. When it reached our area, the tzaddikim and holy Jews cried out like a whooping crane – but none listen to them, as the nonbelievers already have the upper hand.



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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.