

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A One-Time Opportunity

By Yossi Katz

“THE ARCHITECT OF the world never does the same thing twice. Every day is an entirely new creation” – Reb Noson of Breslov

People like to say, “Today is a new day.” There’s actually an incredible amount of wisdom in that expression. That’s because we have a tendency to view time as one complete unit, and therefore we get caught up in the past. If yesterday was a “bad” day, it means today doesn’t have much of a chance. Truth be told, each day is a new creation. If it weren’t, God wouldn’t bother recreating the world over and over again; after all, who likes reruns?

The Torah prescribes a day-based waiting period depending on the severity of the impurity that a person came in contact with. For example, one who has a minor encounter, like a seminal emission, only has to wait until the sun sets and the next day begins. Someone with a severe impurity, like being in contact with a corpse, requires a seven-day waiting period until he can be purified. This is because each day is different and unique; each day has its own power to cleanse and add additional holiness.

Even after the one who came in contact with a serious impurity has waited seven days and immersed himself in the holy mikvah waters, the Torah says, “And when the sun is down, he shall be clean; and afterward he may eat of the holy things” (Leviticus 22:7). Why should he have to wait? He’s already waited the required amount of days and immersed – shouldn’t that be enough? No, because by waiting just a bit more for the sun to set, he merits receiving the holiness of an additional day – an entirely new creation.

This teaching is very applicable to our own lives. If we feel “unholy” and are dismayed at the prospect of engaging in sincere Torah study, prayer or other spiritual devotions, we should realize that every day is a new opportunity. What we didn’t take advantage of yesterday is no longer applicable because God never creates the same day twice. I must say

to myself, “Today I have the ability to receive something entirely new that will never come into existence again! I need to visualize today as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!”

But what if I take the initiative yet I don’t feel purified? Don’t be discouraged. Depending on the extent of my impurities, I must now be patient and count each day, and in the end I, too, will “eat of the holy things.”

There are seven characteristics through which God reveals Himself to the world. Each of these is represented by a day of the week. According to the Kabbalah, each characteristic can further be divided into seven, as it itself includes all seven characteristics. Thus, there are 49 possible combinations. Paralleling these are the 49 days of the Counting of the Omer. We count each day of the Omer individually to show that every day contains an opportunity to experience a unique manifestation of Godliness. For this reason, if a day goes by without being counted, one cannot continue his or her daily count with a blessing. Every day is a blessing and should be appreciated for its own unique flavor.

So don’t get caught up worrying about yesterday or pushing things off until tomorrow. Living each day as it comes is the way to prepare to receive the ultimate knowledge and connection to the One Above – the Holy Torah. May we merit to count each day individually – with much blessing! Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Birkhot HaShachar 5:41

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Fortify yourselves in Torah and prayer and ask God every day to guard you from all evil and to help you to be good Jews. For nothing remains of a person except whatever he manages to grasp of true Jewish life in this world. (Letter #400)

Avoid the Blame Game

By Yehudis Golshevsky

IT'S HUMAN NATURE to look for an external cause when something goes wrong. People often blame their personal problems and communal struggles on the government's policies...on local and foreign anti-Semites...sometimes even on other "confused and self-hating Jews." After all, whatever is bothering me is probably someone else's fault, right?

Reb Noson dismissed that attitude. "Don't 'blamers' realize that whatever the Jewish people suffer is decreed from Above?" he asked. "Why do they spend time talking about politics and ignore that the spiritual is at the root of our troubles? Rebbe Nachman teaches that one should appreciate that the difficulties in every person's life are much gentler than we deserve. The same is true regarding the Jewish people's many trials and tribulations."

Many people feel that Rebbe Nachman's teachings resonate with them and yearn to live accordingly. Breslover chassidim would say that the first sign that they're starting to integrate the Rebbe's words is that they stop speaking against other people. They don't take any pleasure in discovering and describing other people's flaws. Instead, they develop a stronger awareness of their own flaws, and this leads them to be more forgiving of the foibles of others.

The long years of Communist oppression were marked by periods of intense turmoil and overnight changes. There were hot wars and cold peacetimes, periods of harsh policy followed by sudden relaxation of regulations. Naturally, there was always so much to talk about.

Yet the Breslover Chasidim didn't speak about any of this. They understood that one who is immersed in such matters will have a hard time focusing on Divine service. The outward conditions are always so nuanced and in flux; they tend to fill one's attention to the exception of anything else. Another matter that Breslovers never discussed was the claims of their detractors. One could potentially spend the entire day chewing over every bit of news and rumor. What a great way to ensure that we accomplish as little as possible in serving God!

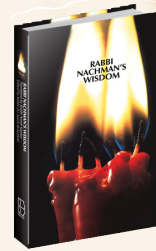
Instead, they made it a practice to focus only on the spiritual demands of the day. We are here on a journey with a mission. Why allow ourselves to be distracted from our primary purpose?

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:442, V:438, VIII:33

SIDEPATH

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

223. A number of people were once praising Rashi's commentaries in the Rebbe's presence. The gist of the conversation was that for a straightforward commentary on the Bible, one need only use Rashi's commentary, as many of the others follow the philosophers.



The Rebbe then remarked, "You may not realize it, but Rashi is like the Torah's brother. Every Jew, from childhood on, studies both the Written and Oral Torah with Rashi's commentary. Think of this and you will understand Rashi's unique greatness."

224. Our Sages teach that it is forbidden to gaze at what is above and below, what is before and what is after (*Chagigah* 11b). The Rebbe said, "There is a different 'above and below' for each individual where he may not gaze. It all depends on his level."

There are those whose intellect can go no further than the bounds of the physical world. They are therefore forbidden to delve any further. This is true of philosophers and scientists. Their intellect may reach up to the stars, but it cannot penetrate further. They know nothing beyond the sphere of the physical, and even within it, they are often mistaken, leading to their many disputes.

Every man has a place where his intellect ends. Beyond this, it is forbidden for him to gaze, for this is "what is above and below." There he must depend on faith alone.



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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.