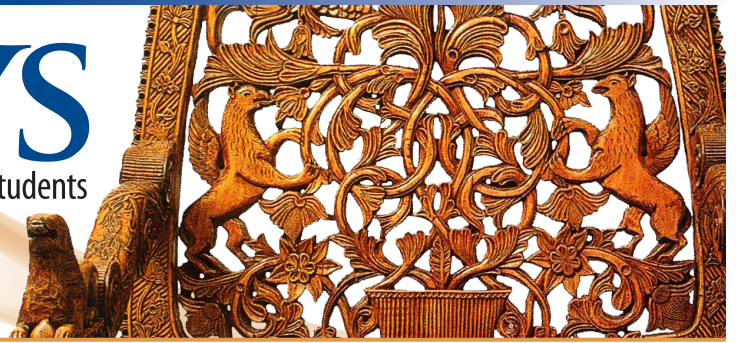


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Should We Laugh Or Cry?

By Yossi Katz

WHEN I THINK of the summer, I imagine people reclining on golden, sandy beaches, letting the cool waves wash up against their feet. They have no worries at all, just lots of time to relax and enjoy.

The Jewish calendar is our spiritual compass; it points us in the direction we should be heading. Just as the summer beckons, the Three Weeks come along and restrict us from some of those pleasures. The end of next week ushers in the Nine Days, further impacting our summer vacation plans. Is our Jewish calendar anti-Semitic? This oddity has always bothered me, particularly in the summer!

Our Rabbis make a very interesting connection. They teach that a hen lays her egg after 21 days. Similarly, the *luz* (usually translated as almond) tree takes 21 days from the time it flowers until its fruit ripens (see *Bekhorot* 8a). Rebbe Nachman explains that these 21 days allude to the Three Weeks; 21 days are the necessary incubation period before a rebirth. This is why it is the *luz* bone of the spine that will remain in the grave after the rest of the body has decomposed, and from it, the body will be built anew at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead. Likewise, the eating of the egg at the final meal before Tisha B'Av begins* symbolizes the rebirth we will experience on that day, as we have been taught that Mashiach will be born on Tisha B'Av and that day will eventually become a festival (see *Likutey Moharan* II, 85:2).

But something is very odd about this whole process. On the one hand, the *luz* symbolizes future rebirth, but why then does it ripen after 21 days, which represent mourning and sadness (and our being restricted from the summer festivities)? And why does the same egg that we eat at the mourner's meal right before the onset of Tisha B'Av also symbolize rebirth? As they say, "Should I laugh or cry?"

We can answer this riddle and solve the timing of the Jewish calendar by examining a kosher egg. The sign of a kosher egg is one round end and one pointy end. Isaiah said, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword" (Isaiah 49:2). The pointy or sharp side corresponds to the times

we experience great joy and festivity. We can laugh and scream with our mouths. But there is also a "flip side" – the round end of the egg represents the roundness of the human life cycle, which is why eggs are the traditional meal of mourners.

A kosher egg is the symbol of a healthy and wholesome life. When we were little kids, we viewed life as being just a lot of fun and adventure. Unfortunately, when we got older, the tragedies and difficulties of life made us think only of running away. But the real Jewish attitude is to understand that we are here for a purpose. God is constantly bringing the world closer to its rectification. When we are able to understand that this is a difficult process, but at the end we will merit a spiritual rebirth, the difficulties become lined with an awesome feeling of consolation and closeness to God.

Imagine the joy a mother feels after nine months of difficult childbearing, when she can finally hold her baby in her arms. With our *emunah* (faith), we can experience this consolation even now, during the Three Weeks, and also during all of life's challenges. The contrast between summer vacation and the timing of the Jewish calendar creates the feeling necessary to take part in this process. The egg eaten on the eve of Tisha B'Av reminds us that even at the greatest moment of tribulation, redemption is already in play.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Beitzim 5

**This year we do not eat this meal, since the eve of Tisha B'Av falls on Shabbat.*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV
Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



We know there is no refuge other than God from all that we must endure in this world. God's only intention in everything He brings upon us is for us to remember Him and pray to Him. (Letter #51)

Faith Under Fire

By Chaim Kramer

AFTER REBBE NACHMAN'S passing, Reb Noson and the Breslover chassidim were persecuted by other chassidim who wanted to stop the growing movement. Reb Noson endured insults, imprisonment and even exile. Yet despite his suffering, his faith in God never wavered.

Reb Noson's enemies reported to the regional governor that he was operating an illegal printing press. Though Reb Noson protested that he had not operated the press for nearly a decade, the investigator had been bribed and accepted the testimony of twelve "witnesses." Reb Noson was taken to the Breslov prison and placed in a cell together with thieves and murderers.

In Russia, the first thing prisoners demanded of a new inmate was money for alcoholic drinks. Reb Noson had nothing to give them. They took several pieces of cord and twisted them into a thick rope with which to strike him. Just as they raised the rope against him, Reb Noson let out a terrifying yell. The warden came running, but only warned the other prisoners not to touch him. Meanwhile, Reb Noson's supporters bribed the governor of Breslov to have Reb Noson moved to his own cell the next night.

During his ten days in prison, Reb Noson wrote his discourse in *Likutey Halakhot, Yayin Nesech 4*, which emphasizes the harm done by alcohol. It discusses the importance of being attached to the tzaddik and following his teachings, as opposed to spending one's time drinking and mocking the truth. It also speaks about sacrificing oneself for one's faith, and discusses the imprisonment of an innocent person, which Reb Noson compares to the way a person's evil desires close in on him.

Even in prison, Reb Noson remained steadfast in his devotions – praying loudly, studying Torah, and keeping up his *chatzot* prayers at night. His prayers were so intense that the other prisoners complained he never let them sleep! When he was released on bail shortly before Tisha B'Av, he wrote to his son:

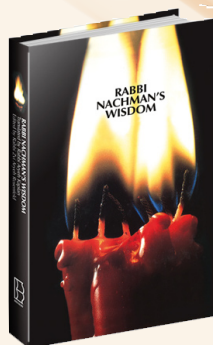
Each day, everyone suffers all kinds of bitterness. All of it stems from the destruction of the Holy Temple, which is the main source of holiness, the main source of life. ... We must never give up hope, and we must never despair of praying and crying out to God. In the end, He will save us and give us true and eternal consolation.

From "Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov"

SIDEPATH

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

250. I heard the Rebbe say, "Why worry about livelihood? The only thing to worry about is that you may die of hunger if you cannot make a living at all. And if you die, what is so terrible? You must die anyway."



251. The Rebbe told a number of people to read through the entire Bible during the days of Elul, the Ten Days of Repentance, and the Days of Awe until Hoshana Rabbah.

252. The Rebbe said that when people come close to a true tzaddik, they have a taste of the Garden of Eden. The holy *Zohar* (II, 166b) says, "The tzaddik is the Gardener of the Garden."

253. One of the Rebbe's followers had been married for many years but had no children. One day he was in the Rebbe's house with a number of other childless men who had come to plead that the Rebbe intercede for them.

The Rebbe replied, "Why all this commotion? The main offspring of the righteous are their good deeds. Ask that you be a good Jew – that you be worthy of following the true path. If you are worthy of physical children, all the better. But the most important thing is to come close to God."



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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.

Dedicated in the Memory (L'Ilui Nishmat) of Yehudis bat Shimon