

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Every Day Counts

By Yossi Katz

IF YOU'VE EVER *davened* (prayed) in a Breslov shul during these days of counting the Omer, then you've witnessed the incredible intensity and devotion that Breslov Chassidim invest in their Omer counting. The whole service, perhaps one page long, can take up to an hour for them to recite. Obviously, this practice must be very meaningful and tremendously important. (If you have a chance, go to a Breslov shul and experience it for yourself!)

What exactly is the Omer offering? The offering is barley; on the second day of Pesach, an Omer (a measure equal to approximately 2 quarts) of barley was waved in the six directions (north, south, east, west, up and down). Barley is traditionally considered animal food. What kind of offering is this, anyway?

Moreover, the 49 days of the Omer correspond to the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. These days are considered preparatory days, when we ascend from the 49 levels of impurity in Egypt and rise to the 50th level of holiness, becoming fit to receive the Torah on Shavuot. What is the connection between counting the Omer and building our personal capacity for receiving the Torah?

Part of the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was not just the destruction of our enemies, but also our spiritual rescue: a spiritually despondent nation became elevated to incredible new heights. When we tasted our awesome potential, not only were our bodies redeemed, but so were our spirits. However, this presented a problem. Since we didn't initiate this process, we weren't capable of permanently maintaining our new connection with God. Just as it's unhealthy for a nutritionally destitute person to immediately overload on nutritionally dense food, so too, we are incapable of maintaining this new, elevated level. We have to take a few steps back and begin to build strong enough vessels to hold the awesome light. These are the 49 days.

We need animal food in order to build our spiritual muscles. We must become strong enough to lift even the

lowest, most challenging encounter and wave it in all six directions, symbolizing that God is everywhere and in everything.

Life is not just about experiencing miraculous revelations of Godliness, but about seeing Him and connecting to Him even when the worst perceived "garbage" is thrown at us. There are only seven days in a week. The Kabbalah explains that each day can be subdivided further to include all seven days within it. The 49 days of the Omer are therefore a microcosm of every conceivable type of day that's possible to experience. In order to rise to the level of being able to receive the Torah, we must first learn to appreciate each and every day as being a unique and worthy vessel with which to experience Godliness. During the Omer counting, we are correcting our "free ride" out of Egypt and engaging in the process necessary to build a true connection with our Creator.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once abducted by the Soviet authorities and taken in the middle of the night to Siberia without even his coat. After his release, he met a great Rabbi who asked him, "How did you manage to keep going during such a difficult time?"

Rabbi Abramsky answered that he was taken with nothing but the shirt on his back, no overcoat, *tallit* or *tefillin*. When he woke up in the morning and wanted to say "*Modeh ani*," thanking God for His many kindnesses, he found this most difficult. What was there to be thankful for? But then he reached the words "*rabba emunasecha*" (great is Your faith). He then thought, "I still have my faith!" He realized that the most precious and powerful thing in the world still remained with him.

The Rabbi replied, "It was worth you experiencing this entire horrible ordeal in order to attain this level of faith."

The laws of the Omer counting stress that one should not miss counting even a single day. This is the law of life itself. Each person has awesome spiritual potential; each of us can reach the 50th level of holiness – the level of personally receiving the Torah at Sinai. But first, we must learn to count today. Have you counted yet?

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pikadon 4

A Fiery Law

By Yehudis Golshevsky

Rebbe Nachman's oldest daughter was given the name Adil after his grandmother, the righteous daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. The name itself was created by the holy Baal Shem Tov, an acronym of the *aleph-dalet-lamed* initials of the verse "From His right hand came a fiery law to them" (Deuteronomy 33:2). The original Adil was a kind of "right-hand" to the Baal Shem Tov, in many ways more like a disciple than a daughter.

Rebbe Nachman's relationship with his daughter Adil was also special. He would often confide in his oldest daughter, sharing teachings and insights with her that he sometimes withheld even from his close students.

Once Rebbe Nachman told her, "There once was a famous Tzaddik who spent a long time praying before a cat." When she expressed her surprise, he went on:

"When this famous Tzaddik would pray in his private chamber, he sensed that the door was being pressed upon from the outside. So he thought to himself, 'It must be that my Chassidim want to see how I pray!' And he would whip himself into greater heights of fervor. He was just unaware of one important fact: it wasn't people behind the door, but the cat, who was sharpening her claws on the other side of the doorframe. How terrible." Rebbe Nachman concluded, "All that ... just for the cat!" Adil was astute enough to grasp Rebbe Nachman's intention—that Divine service should focus on God alone, and not the opinions of others.

Adil was intimately familiar with the ways of her father's followers, and could often be relied upon for a definitive opinion about what should be done when others were unsure. One time, the Chassidim were conducting a gathering where Torah thoughts and inspiration were shared, and the women in the next room were having a hard time determining whether the men had already started the Grace after Meals.

Adil smiled and said, "When my father's people *bentsch*, you know it!" A moment later, the women heard the men begin the Grace after Meals with voices raised in passionate prayer...just as she had told them.

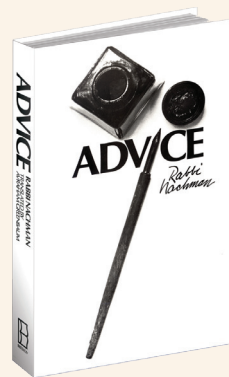
Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 183-185

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

TRUST. 2. When you trust in God and you look to Him alone for all your needs, a vessel is formed with which you can receive His blessing. What you need will be sent to you as and when you require it (*Likutey Moharan I, 76*).

3. There are higher and higher levels of trust, reaching to infinity. The greater a person's wisdom and understanding, the deeper his trust. The more trusting he is, the more generous he will be in giving charity (*ibid. I, 225*).



4. Besides trust in God, there is the trust of the Other Side, which is "trust in a trickster" (Proverbs 25:19). The making of marriage bonds in holiness and purity causes this false trust to be broken like a piece of earthenware. This is the meaning of the custom of breaking a piece of earthenware at the marriage ceremony (*ibid. I, 60:8*).

MODESTY. 1. One should have a strong sense of humility before God. One should feel ashamed to do anything which would not be in accordance with the will of God, and certainly ashamed of actually sinning, God forbid. Having a sense of humility is the foundation for developing genuine fear of Heaven. A person who has no shame in this world will be put to shame in the World to Come. This is the worst of all punishments (*ibid. I, 22*).

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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 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.