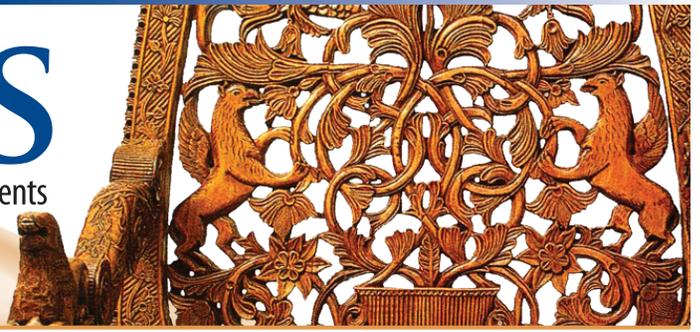


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Let's Be Honest

By Yossi Katz

SHAVUOT IS AN interesting holiday. On the one hand, we celebrate having received the Torah from God's very mouth. This would seem to indicate that our relationship with God was absolutely faithful and strong. Yet just a short time later, the Jewish People violated one of the Torah's most important precepts by making the Golden Calf.

We do not shy away from celebrating Shavuot even though the joy of the main event was marred. Human actions are expected to be far from perfect and many of the Torah's most valuable lessons are learned from our deficiencies. Our main challenge is to grow from these lessons and not be buried by them.

In a similar vein, this week's *parashah* discusses the *Sotah* woman. If a husband becomes suspicious of his wife and warns her not to seclude herself with a certain man, and she nevertheless chooses to do so, she is brought before the Kohen to be "investigated." This priestly investigation involves bringing a barley meal-offering, and she is required to drink from the "bitter waters." Through the drinking of the waters, her guilt or innocence is proven (see Numbers 5:11-31).

Even if she is found innocent of her husband's major accusation, the Torah still considers her at fault for secluding herself with the other man. The description of the *Sotah* begins, "Any man whose wife goes astray" (ibid., 5:12). The word *tiSTeH* (goes astray) has the same letters as *ShoTaH* (idiot). Rashi explains that one does not sin unless a spirit of folly first enters into him or her. Someone with true reasoning would never fall to such temptation.

By secluding herself with another man, the *Sotah* did something born of complete folly; therefore she must

bring an offering consisting of animal food. Just as animals act only according to their impulses, without any higher reasoning, so has the *Sotah* woman.

The *Zohar* (*Raya Mehemna, Emor*) explains that just as the *Sotah* is tested through barley, so too, the Jewish people are tested through the barley of the Omer offering.

By bringing the Omer offering, we are identifying with the *Sotah* woman and with the personal deficiencies in our relationship with God. We are saying, "We, too, have secluded ourselves with temptation and mindlessness; we, too, have sunken to very promiscuous places. However, by waving the Omer offering in every direction, we demonstrate that God still surrounds us and we reaffirm that our relationship is still faithful and strong."

Interestingly, even though the *Sotah* is at fault for secluding herself, now that she is proven innocent, she is rewarded. Our Rabbis teach that whatever childbearing issue she had beforehand will now be reversed. For example, if she previously bore children with much pain, she will now be blessed with easy pregnancy (see *Sotah* 26a). The great embarrassment she experienced while being investigated serves as an atonement for her wrongdoing, and her wrongful act is transformed for her merit.

We all mess up. Making mistakes is part of human nature and allows for free will. Only our souls, which are forced to live within the confines of the human body with all its desires and physical necessities, can give God the ultimate *nachas*. If we are honest, and are able to own up to our many faults and challenges, then our shame and embarrassment serve as a catalyst for blessing and our eventual success. However, if we are unable to be honest about our deficiencies and life challenges, then just like the *Sotah* woman, we will eventually be forced to drink of the bitter waters of life and our end will not be so sweet. May we all merit serving God with truth, amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaPeirot 5

Perfect Hospitality

By Yehudis Golshevsky

BEFORE HIS DAUGHTER Sarah's wedding, Rebbe Nachman devoted time to teaching her concepts that he hoped would help her throughout her life. He spent much time explaining the greatness of the mitzvah of opening her home to guests. Rebbe Nachman wanted his daughter to have special enthusiasm and love for this mitzvah in particular, knowing full well the spiritual rectifications that take place throughout the worlds when proper care is taken of the guests that God sends us.

After all of her father's impassioned teaching, Sarah grasped the importance of the mitzvah, but now had a new question. Since the mitzvah is so great—it's considered even greater than receiving the Divine Presence—how would it be possible for her to ever carry it out properly, in the best way? It seemed too much for someone like her to be able to perform the mitzvah as it really should be done.

So she brought her question to her father, and Rebbe Nachman answered with classic simplicity, "A guest? It's the simplest thing in the world—another slice of bread, and another space at the table!"

The loftiness of the mitzvah shouldn't make us think that it's beyond us our capacity to fulfill. There's no contradiction between a mitzvah being profound, and at the same time profoundly simple to carry out with good intentions. True, one could exert oneself endlessly to carry out this mitzvah, but if we make it into something grandiose, we'll never do it at all!

* * *

Once Rebbe Nachman visited Sarah after her marriage and found her in a terrible mood. The serving girl who helped her at home had fallen short in her duties and she was frustrated that the girl would not follow her instructions.

Rebbe Nachman said, "You should have prayed for this under your chuppah too, on your wedding day, that your household help won't get you upset!"

He meant to teach her that the wedding day itself has great power. It's possible to accomplish everything on that day through prayer. The potential of the day should be exploited to the greatest extent. Nothing is too small to pray about on a day when all the Heavenly gates are open!

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 205-206

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

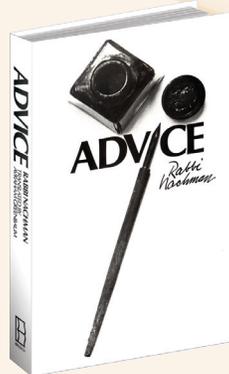
ENCOURAGEMENT. 5. When it is time for a person to advance from one level to the next, he must first experience a fall before he can rise up. The whole purpose of the fall is to prepare for the advance. ... No matter how you may fall, you should never allow yourself to be discouraged. Remain firm and resolute and pay no attention to the fall at all. In the end the

fall will be transformed into a great advance. This is its whole purpose (Likutey Moharan I, 22:11).

6. In order to serve God, one must start advancing from level to level. Each time a person emerges from one level in order to rise up to the next, the "husks" attack him again in the form of temptations, fantasies, strange thoughts, confusions and all kinds of other obstacles. They

range themselves against him and refuse to allow him to enter the gates of holiness.

Many sincere people get very discouraged when they find themselves suddenly confronted by all these temptations and obstacles. They start thinking they must have fallen from their previous level because for some time now they had not experienced all these temptations to the same degree. But they should understand that what they are experiencing is not a fall. The time has come for them to advance from one level to the next (ibid., I, 25).



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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.