

Dvar Torah for Shavuot

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June 1, 2011



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Based on *Sichot HaRan (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom) #51*

On a Shavuot night over 200 years ago, Rebbe Nachman shared with his chassidim some thoughts about the purpose of life, how to not be distracted from that purpose and how to achieve it, or at least try to achieve it.

He started out by saying:

"This world has no purpose but to draw [oneself] towards the eternal goal."

That's pretty straightforward. In fact, it can be understood as a paraphrase of Rebbe Yaakov's Mishnah, (Avot 4:21), "This world is like a corridor leading to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the corridor so you can enter the ballroom."

One of the difficulties in preparing in our little corridor, is the need for money. Why? Because grocers don't stand outside giving away food and clothiers don't shlep people into the store begging them to choose what they want to take home. But once we start earning money, we are deluded into thinking, "If I made more, I would have everything." Rebbe Nachman said the opposite is true.

“Do not be concerned with whether or not you have money, because either way, your days will pass. The world deceives us completely. It makes a person think that he is constantly profiting, but in the end there is nothing. People spend years in business, but are left empty-handed.

“Even one who attains wealth is taken away from it. A person and money cannot endure together. Either the money is taken from the person, or the person is taken from the money. There has never been an instance of a person remaining with his money.

“Where is all the money that people have been making since the beginning of time? People have always been making money—where is it all? It is really absolutely nothing.”

OK, so now we know the goal of life and how to overcome the distraction of pursuing wealth. We will dedicate our life to serving God and serve Him like He’s never been served before, right? Well, maybe. After all, He’s perfect in every sort of way. Infinite. We may be intelligent, strong, etc., but we’re still limited. How can our efforts and deeds be anything but puny in comparison to God’s greatness. The best we can hope for is to honestly want to serve Him, no matter what.

“And serving God? I don’t know of anyone who can claim that he serves God according to His greatness. Anyone who has an inkling of God’s greatness—I don’t understand how he can claim to serve God! Not even the highest angels can boast that they truly serve God. The main thing is desire. Always yearn to approach God.

“Many want to serve God, but the degrees of desire are not the same. Even an individual’s level of desire constantly fluctuates. The main thing is the will and longing, to yearn for God. From this [longing] one prays, studies and keeps His mitzvot.”

There are at least two things to avoid in your great desire to

be a dedicated Jew. The first is the temptation to get fancy in serving God.

“Sophistication is worthless; only naivety and simplicity [have value]. Even in one’s naivety, it is forbidden to be foolish. But sophistication is totally unnecessary.”

The other thing that must be avoided is complacency, even, perhaps especially, if you’re succeeding in keeping the Torah.

“It is not good to be old; even to be an old chassid or an old tzaddik is not good. You must renew yourself each day, always making a fresh start. Only one thing improves with age. The Talmud teaches that a pig becomes stronger as it grows older” (*Shabbat 77b*).

So, to stay fresh and untouched by the temptations and attitudes of those who pursue worldly goods and fashions, perhaps we should go to the other extreme and be involved in absolutely nothing but Torah study, study, study with prayer, prayer, prayer and mitzvahs, mitzvahs, mitzvahs? Hmm, what did the Rebbe say?

“Abandon, too, is unnecessary.

“I don’t consider serving God fanaticism. On the contrary, those who pursue worldly goals and are distant from serving God are the true fanatics. Nevertheless, even what society considers fanaticism—totally abandoning all worldly pursuits to involve oneself solely in Divine worship—is also unnecessary. One can be a kosher person without fanaticism.”

Rebbe Nachman then warned us to be careful to not be outsmarted by life.

“Take it from me: Do not let the world fool you. Do not let it deceive you, because no one ever had a happy ending from this world. Every person, even those who acquired all it has to offer, met a bitter fate. The harm and loss is not only

theirs, but also of future generations.”

Finally, the Rebbe finished this part of that Shavuot night talk by letting us know how fortunate we are, and by extension how grateful we ought to be, to have the Torah.

“Non-Jews, as well, need to know this: If the world is nothing, what can one do? To answer this, one must have help from on high. But Israel needs no further help, for the Torah has already taught us.”

agut yom tov!

chag sameach!

Happy holiday!

agutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

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