

From Karet to Keter

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From the profound shock that has gripped the world, still, we must strive to maintain a positive outlook and embrace “simcha” because it’s the only way to regain our footing. While the current circumstances are painful with the loss of loved ones and widespread destruction, we must connect our perspective to the grander scheme of the final redemption. In that ultimate context, all our trials will be reconciled.

In light of these concepts, we observe the world, with some individuals awakening to the truth and others remaining entrenched in their nonobservant ways. Despite the awakening of some, the unsettling reality persists: a significant portion of Jewish people worldwide are disconnected from their faith, willingly or unwillingly transgressing Torah laws. This results in various transgressions with punitive measures, known as “Karet (כרת),” which can entail being cut off from one’s rightful place in the World to Come, a shortened lifespan, or the loss of one’s offspring. We find ourselves in a unique predicament where the majority of Jews around the world are not observant, marking an unprecedented shift in our history.

Up until two centuries ago, the majority of Jews worldwide adhered to the Torah. They held onto their faith, which preserved their existence and prevented assimilation. However, in the past two centuries, movements like Reform Judaism and the Haskalah enlightened movement have caused Jews to lose their way, leading to the destruction of many generations through assimilation and loss of identity. Many of today’s Jewish individuals, whether knowingly or unknowingly, are disconnected from their heritage.

The difference is stark; a Jew with “emunah” sees life’s purpose with clarity, understanding that this world is a preparatory stage for the afterlife, a realm of consequences and rewards. In contrast, atheists, including some Jews, are, in essence, gambling with their existence, risking dire consequences should their beliefs prove unfounded. It’s crucial to recognize the gravity of the choices we make, especially when they pertain to our eternal fate.

I recall a conversation with a young teenager who, though raised religious, had drifted away. When asked about his plans for the future, he couldn’t answer the most fundamental question – what happens after this life? Ignoring such existential questions is akin to self-deception, as we

ultimately fool only ourselves in this world.

It's apparent that people are struggling to grasp the ultimate purpose of life. Rebbe Nachman teaches that if a Jew possessed a tranquil and clear mind, known as "yishuv hada'at," they would perceive life's ultimate purpose with unmistakable clarity. However, most people lack this clarity in their minds. They're not calm, and they aren't focused on the ultimate purpose.

As a result, the majority of Jewish people, out of a worldwide population of 15 to 16 million, do not follow Torah observance. Many are unfamiliar with fundamental aspects of Jewish life, such as the Shema Yisrael or the laws of family purity. This leads them to transgress numerous commandments, including the serious offense of working on Shabbat. The question arises: what hope remains for these individuals?

To understand our current predicament, it's valuable to consider the Jewish history, marked by four distinct exiles: Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome. Each of these exiles corresponds to different levels of Torah study: Pshat (simple meaning), Remez (hints and hidden meanings), Drash (expanded explanations), and Sod (the mystical-kabbalistic level). These levels were emphasized at different times to combat the challenges of their respective exiles.

In the Egyptian exile, Moshe Rabbeinu emphasized the Pshat, the simple meaning of Torah, to help the Jews break free. They received the entire Torah at Mount Sinai, but the Pshat level was enough to sustain the Jews in that era.

In the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people needed Remez, the level of hints and hidden meanings, to stand against their oppressors.

Similarly, in the Greek exile, Drash, or expanded explanations of Torah, played a vital role in preserving Jewish identity.

And in our final exile under Rome, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed the Zohar, and later, the Ari revealed the secrets of Kabbalah. This fourth exile is exceptionally challenging, and delving into deeper levels of Torah, especially the mystical teachings, has become essential to weather its darkness.

Ignoring the existential question of 'what happens after this life?' is akin to self-deception, as we ultimately fool only ourselves in this world

However, today, despite the profound insights of the Zohar, the teachings of the Ari, and the mystical dimensions of Kabbalah, it's evident that many Jews are still lost. We've strayed significantly. As Rebbe Nachman aptly put it: a Jew must traverse a narrow bridge, but many, many have already fallen off that bridge. We're witnessing a national shift away from the path of Torah observance.

Even those who do practice Judaism sometimes find it dry, uninspiring, and lifeless. They seek enthusiasm and fulfillment elsewhere – in movies, Netflix, Hollywood, or various other distractions. So, what's the solution? How can we navigate this challenging period of the final exile before the arrival of Mashiach, marked by intense pain and turmoil?

This is where the fifth level of Torah, known as Keter, comes into play. It necessitates a high exposure to Hashem's Infinite Light, a level that can infuse life and hope into the spiritually drained and dispirited people of today. People are yearning for light, represented by the gematria of "Or," meaning "light," which equals 207, the same as the gematria for the Infinite Light – אור אור אור.

To address this profound need, we require a spiritual infusion that transcends the boundaries of typical Torah study. We need the "Infinite Light" that Keter represents, and this is precisely where Chassidut, particularly Rebbe Nachman's teachings, takes center stage.

Rebbe Nachman referred to himself as a “man of wonder-□□□,” (Pele-wonder represents the Infinite Light-Keter which is beyond human grasp).

His teachings aim to transmit the radiance of the Keter level. The Keter, representing the crown, conceals the unfathomable and transcendent aspects of the Torah. It goes beyond the grasps of the simpler levels: Pshat, Remz, Drash, and Sod. The Keter is a dazzling light that one can't experience constantly; it comes and goes, leaving a lasting impression or “reshimu.”

In Kabbalah, the Keter is compared to being “in and out,” a connection that ebbs and flows, too powerful to be sustained continuously. Rebbe Nachman emphasized that he aimed to bring this level of Torah to people, especially those who had strayed so far that conventional Torah teachings are insufficient.

Here, the connection between Keter (the crown) and Karet (excision) is significant. The Torah of the Keter, represented by the same letters, holds the only hope for individuals who have transgressed to the point where they face the severe penalty of Karet. It's the only level that can provide them with hope and redemption.

Rebbe Nachman taught in Likutey Moharan lesson 30 that when a person is profoundly spiritually unwell, they need the greatest specialist Tzaddik and guide possible. Similarly, in our spiritual healing, when we've transgressed Pshat, Remz, Drash, and Sod levels of Torah, we must turn to the Keter level to save us from Karet.

As we approach the culmination of our exile, Rebbe Nachman's teachings and the broader teachings of Chassidut offer hope for those whom others may have given up on. While many rabbis can only care for their own flocks, Chassidut holds the light of the Keter, offering hope and healing even for the most lost

souls, especially in a generation where the majority have been forsaken. Rebbe Nachman, with his profound connection to the Keter, is one of the tzaddikim who can help guide us through this challenging time.

This highest level, the Keter, has been concealed, awaiting the right moment to be unveiled. These few hundred years before Mashiach's arrival are the perfect time for its revelation. Now, more than ever, it is essential as the Jewish people are facing unprecedented challenges.

As Rebbe Nachman proclaimed over two centuries ago in 1807-1808, we have reached a unique phase in Jewish history where we are near the end of our people's journey. When the Jewish nation approaches its end, they are very, very distant from Hashem.

In light of the tumultuous events in the world, from the Holocaust to recent upheavals that leave us in shock, our main hope is to connect with the Keter. May we be privileged to access its light. (for further discussion as to how to connect to the Keter, please see Likutey Moharan lesson 24)

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