

Pathways: Getting Past the Clouds

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I personally don't like cold weather. Growing up in Toronto, I remember walking home from school in the icy, cold and already darkening afternoon hours. Even today, as I sit in my warm minivan, when the forecast predicts wintry weather, I begin to brainstorm ways of getting to Florida in a jiffy. It's just a two-and-a-half-hour flight to paradise. Although I never end up making it there, just the thought that it's warm somewhere in the world gives a certain comfort.

This is not only true of the weather, but also of our spiritual "forecast" and outlook. We all love warm, sunny days with a clear blue sky and a gentle breeze. Wouldn't it be nice to have these kinds of days when we're trying to grow spiritually as well?

Picture the perfect day. You wake up in the morning and give heartfelt thanks to God for restoring your special *neshamah* (soul). You begin the day with sincere prayer and

inspirational Torah study. You are both productive and diligent at work while finding deep meaning and connection with what you're doing. You remember to make time for your family and community. You also work on your character traits and, of course, avoid ever becoming angry, jealous or arrogant.

But when was the last time you actually had a day like that? Why do our days seem to always get so cloudy and murky? We all want to live this way, but "stuff happens" and we lose focus and fall back down to "reality."

One of Rebbe Nachman's basic teachings is the concept of *yeridah tachlit aliyah* (falling for the purpose of rising). This means that although we perceive we are spiritually falling, in actuality, we are being prepared for our future spiritual ascent.

In our *parashah*, Jacob has suffered for many years because he was under the impression that his beloved son Joseph had died. One day he receives word that tells him he's been mistaken all this time. Joseph is alive and well, and is viceroy of Egypt! Jacob is jubilant, and desires to immediately see his son.

But he is also afraid. Joseph lives in Egypt and Jacob resides in the Land of Israel. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim* (constrictions), alluding to the bitter constraints of the exile. It is a place of darkness, a cloudy and cold place. Since hearing the good news, Jacob has been overjoyed and the prophecy that left him because of his depressed state has been restored. How can he now go "down" to Egypt? God reveals to him, "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back up" (Genesis 46:4).

God is always with us, even when we feel that we are distant. Wherever a Jew goes, God is always there with him. Perhaps to us it looks like a cold and cloudy day, but we fail to see the sun behind the clouds. Only God knows what is best for us, and

that what we perceive to be bitter and painful is actually therapeutic and healthy.

Furthermore, God does not conceal Himself for one extra second. Just as the moon, at its darkest moment, is really renewing itself so that it can wax full and bright in the nighttime sky once again, so God acts with us. We think that it is too late, that things are too difficult, that we've made too many mistakes and the day has already been wasting. Don't throw in the towel! Hold on just a little bit longer and you will discover that God has been with you the entire time, and that all of your difficulties were only paving the way for incredible spiritual growth and inner meaning.

Based on Likutey Halakhot V, p. 286-144a-288