

Reaching The 50th Gate: Week 2 (UPDATED)

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We have now entered the second week of the seven-week Omer counting period. The weeks between Pesach and Shavuot each represent one of God's seven attributes, by emulating these characteristics, we are able to prepare ourselves for the spiritual mastery necessary for receiving the Torah on Sinai.

Gevurah – Part 1

Chesed represents giving. What happens, though, if the beneficence is too much and cannot be handled properly by the beneficiary? What if unrestricted love becomes overbearing?

Can Chesed still be called kindness? Is there a way to stop Chesed from being overwhelming? The answer lies in the next Sefirah, Gevurah.

Gevurah means strength, power, heroism or courage. It implies great power and energy, along with willpower and toughness. It is the “left hand” to Chesed’s “right hand,” the discipline and restraint to Chesed’s benevolence and beneficence. Gevurah acts to restrain the overwhelming attributes associated with Chesed, allowing us to define, contain and properly utilize the blessings found in the latter Sefirah.

In the Kabbalah, Gevurah serves as the attribute of Judgment, because a judgment imposes restraining or constricting orders with regard to a person’s movements. One who must pay a fine for misbehavior or who is sent to prison for a crime is no longer free to act as he wishes. On a deeper level, Gevurah represents “severities”—harsh suffering that results when a judgment is not tempered with compassion. (For example, the original restrictions placed upon a person are considered too lenient and when the case is reviewed, a harsher sentence is handed down.)

Gevurah, in a negative sense, can also be associated with anger. Rebbe Nachman teaches that when a person is angry, he is said to be in a state of “constricted intellect” (see Likutey Moharan I, 21:12). An angry person often acts as if he is “blinded” by rage and will rarely listen to reason; hence, anger constricts his intellect. All these ideas of constriction are seen in the concept of Gevurah, which is also, conceptually, the Tzimtzum of Creation.

Gevurah emphasizes our responsibilities even—and especially—while we are engaged in acts of Chesed. It fortifies us with the discipline necessary to constrain the overwhelming desires of our minds and hearts, and to establish parameters to surround and protect our efforts to actualize our potential. It gives us the power to control our natural inclinations and

desires, a necessary trait in all areas of life.

Included within the boundaries of Gevurah is the conscious avoidance of anger, jealousy and any form of cruelty. For example, a parent might wish to discipline a child. Is the discipline a result of the parent's desire for the child's welfare, or his own impatience?

Alternately, in the area of heroism, are one's efforts solely dedicated to God and Godliness, or do his intentions lean towards self-aggrandizement and one-upmanship? Gevurah—restraint—demands that we continually evaluate our thoughts, words and deeds and purge them of ulterior motives and hidden agendas.

Gevurah also implies acting with simplicity. A self-disciplined person approaches each task in a simple and straightforward manner. A person who acts in a sophisticated manner, constantly reaching beyond his capabilities or the task at hand, will soon find himself treading in deep water. Philosophical pursuits of the intellect, for example, steer a person away from God and Godliness and the attainment of his rightful goals.

By invoking Gevurah in the proper manner, we can enhance our lives and become true recipients of the blessings and bounty brought down through Chesed and the Mochin. Moreover, when we properly invoke the power of Gevurah in our own lives, we can "convince" God, as it were, to restrain His judgments, which in turn allows us to benefit from His Chesed.

Let us turn to Rebbe Nachman for advice on acquiring and developing this invaluable attribute.

Always remember you are a part of God above. The essence of Godliness is to be found in the heart. The Godliness in your heart is infinite. There is no end to the light of the flame that burns there. The holy desire which is there is infinite. But this same burning passion makes it impossible for you to

accomplish anything at all in your service of God, nor would you be able to reveal any good trait, if you did not hold this passion within certain limits. You must “contract” it, so to speak, in order to be able to serve God in a measured and orderly way. God desires your service. There are specific actions and devotions which He asks of you. He wants you to develop your character traits and behavior in an orderly, systematic manner. This is how His kingship will be revealed (Likutey Moharan I, 49:1).

The passion about which Rebbe Nachman speaks is holy desire taken to the wrong extreme. Most of us are more familiar with the opposite type of passion, that of our evil inclination. This is a burning desire to go against the Will of God—to be lazy, uncaring, mean, hardhearted, and all the other adjectives that pose a challenge to God and His world. If we let our evil inclination burn without restraint, our lives will be totally subjugated to the negative traits and immoral attractions of this world.

But one who subdues his evil inclination must make sure he doesn't go too far to the other extreme. Zealousness and fanaticism have no place in Rebbe Nachman's code; they represent a force of “unrestrained love” beyond one's control. They act to occlude God's Kingship, not reveal it.

Rebbe Nachman is not the only teacher who advocates self control, but his path offers the most simplified approach to mastering it. He expresses it this way: “Free choice is really that simple. If you want, you do it. If you don't want, you don't do it!” (Likutey Moharan II, 110). Reb Noson adds that he recorded this statement because of its towering significance. Many people think they do not have control over themselves. They are steeped in their habits from early on and feel they cannot exercise any restraint. But this is not true. At all times, in all places, a person has free choice. “If you want, you do it. If not, not!” This leads to another important idea: We can only invoke our Gevurah if we believe we have

that strength within us. Faith in ourselves is the prerequisite for tapping into the energy of this Sefirah. It takes enormous strength to maintain our beliefs and act upon them when necessary. This manifestation of faith is the manifestation of Gevurah, resulting in both control of a situation that we believe is for our good and self-control, as we utilize our energies to move in the direction that is really the right choice for us. None of this can be accomplished except through the simplified approach, as Rebbe Nachman teaches, "The greatest cleverness is to work out how to avoid sophistication" (Likutey Moharan II, 44).

"Many times the Rebbe said that no sophistication is needed in serving God," Reb Noson adds. "All that is required is simplicity, sincerity and faith" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #101).

Thought-Control

Of all the areas under our control, it seems that the mind often "has a mind of its own." Rebbe Nachman notes that the mind is the training ground for Gevurah and self-control: Be very careful to guard your mind and your thoughts and make sure that you never admit to alien ideas or ways of looking at things. All problems and sins come from abusing the sanctity of the mind by admitting alien thoughts and ideologies. To achieve true repentance and to make amends for all one's sins, it is necessary to cleanse the mind of all these alien ideas. Wisdom and intelligence are actually the soul. By clearing the mind of alien ideologies, the faculty of thought is elevated to its Source. This is the essence of returning to God (Likutey Moharan I, 35:1).

It's especially difficult to control our thoughts during prayer. It sounds so simple to spend a few minutes with a siddur, or to pour out our hearts to the Master of the World, but it is far from easy to combat the deluge of thoughts, fantasies, memories, to-do lists and other distractions that

bombard us right at that quiet moment. What's worse, the very act of trying to rid ourselves of these thoughts makes them entrench themselves deeper.

Surprising but true: "The best way to deal with [unwanted thoughts] is simply to ignore them," Rebbe Nachman teaches. "Act as if you were completely unconcerned. Refuse to listen. Carry on with what you are doing—studying, praying, working, etc. Pay no attention to the thoughts or fantasies at all. Don't keep looking around to see if they have gone away. Just carry on with what you are trying to do. In the end, they will go away of their own accord. But you should understand that this method is only a temporary measure. In the long run, your task is to sanctify and purify your body. To achieve this you must go to the Tzaddikim to learn the paths of truth. Then thoughts like these will disappear completely" (Likutey Moharan I, 72).

Is it really possible to control our thoughts? Rebbe Nachman assures us that it is. He compares thought to a wayward horse that has turned away from the path and is trying to head off in the wrong direction. The rider need only pull on the bridle to force the horse back onto the path. In the same way, a person's thoughts are completely under his control (Likutey Moharan II, 50).

Thought-control doesn't happen overnight. But when we exercise self-control as often as possible, we learn that we can do it. We can also use to our advantage the fact that the mind cannot hold two thoughts at the same time. No matter what we're thinking about, the minute we introduce a new thought, the previous thought disappears automatically. Any thought can dislodge another— including thoughts about God and Torah and even about work and daily interests (Likutey Moharan I, 233).

Admittedly, the battle of the mind, between good and bad thoughts, rages all day long. What will happen if we don't exercise the control that's demanded of us and from time to

time let our imaginations stroll off the straight and narrow? Rebbe Nachman has already anticipated this question, and provides the answer: When a person admits unholy thoughts to his mind, the holiness of his mind is reduced in direct proportion to the space occupied by these degraded thoughts. If you stick a pole into a riverbed, all kinds of dirt and filth gather around it. In the same way, all kinds of bad characteristics develop because of these unholy ideas, and the mind is assailed with desires and temptations. In fact, all the sins a person commits are ultimately caused by the unholy ideas he originally admitted to his mind. To achieve a pure mind, you must rid your mind of these thoughts. The mind is the soul, and when a person sanctifies his mind he purifies his soul, he merits to elevate everything to its root [the source of his potential] (Likutey Moharan I, 35:1).

Even if a person has been unsuccessful at controlling his thoughts for a long time, all is not lost. Every effort he does make to stem the tide will add a little more strength and a little more purity to his mind.

A person can't always stop bad thoughts from entering his mind in the first place. But he does have the power to reject them once he becomes conscious of them. This is something very important, because it is the way to make amends for sins he may have committed earlier in his life. Perfect repentance has to balance the original sins exactly, and this is literally what happens here. Before, when he sinned, it was because the temptation entered his mind and he succumbed to it. Now the thought is in his mind again, but this time he rejects it (cf. Likutey Moharan I, 26).

So don't feel discouraged if you find all kinds of temptations and fantasies continually pressing on your mind. They are actually providing you with the opportunity to repent and make amends for the damage done in the past. Today you have the power to master your thoughts and temptations. When you do so, the sparks of holiness that shattered and fell because of your

earlier transgressions are released, and you are able to purify yourself. Your mind and your voice will be purified and you will find harmony and peace. This peace can bring the whole world back to the service of God.

Keep It Simple

Let's see how our potential is developing. We had a good thought, it seemed that we could accomplish that idea, and we felt an overwhelming urge to start moving in the chosen direction. Unrestrained, however, we will never get beyond the desire to do what we want, and won't focus on the goal. How many of us look into the distance and set our sights on a certain objective? If we don't check our movements every step of the way, we can easily lose sight of our goal and even veer off course. The overwhelming Chesed that descends to us will be diverted and go to waste. By exercising Gevurah, we can restrain our enthusiasm from time to time and take the opportunity to re-examine the feasibility of our goals. Gevurah will also keep us from getting distracted.

Keeping things simple is the key to staying on track and on target. Sophistication, after all, requires knowledge of many things and takes them all into consideration when seeking a solution. However necessary it is to see the "whole picture," when it comes down to making a decision, a yes or no answer will really suffice. Gevurah (judgment and restraint) keeps us focused on the goal. Rebbe Nachman elaborates: Someone who follows his own ideas can easily fall into all kinds of traps and get into serious trouble. Too many people have been led astray by their own wisdom. They themselves have sinned and have caused many others to sin as well, all because of their fallacious "wisdom." The essence of the Jewish religion is to follow the path of purity and simplicity without sophistication—simply to make sure that God is present in everything you do. Have no thought at all for your own honor and glory. The only question is whether God's glory will be enhanced. If so, do it. If not, then don't do it. This way,

you will never stumble (Likutey Moharan II, 12).

This teaching is based on one of Rebbe Nachman's most awesome lessons, "Ayeh?" This lesson was given in response to the impact of the Haskalah (Enlightenment movement) on the average Jew back in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Oppression by the Russian czars was suffocating the Jews at that time, and a new group of Jewish freethinkers arose that sought relief by abandoning the time-tested paths of Torah and prayer in favor of aping the surrounding culture. This effort, like other breakaway movements throughout the 1,700 years of Jewish exile that preceded it, only brought about new, sophisticated means of oppression, not to mention widespread assimilation.

Obviously, Rebbe Nachman's statement, "Too many people have been led astray by their own wisdom," does not refer to someone who uses his mind to seek solutions to problems. Why else was a person given a mind, if not to think?! Instead, the Rebbe is stressing the importance of simplicity. We have a path that works: the Torah. It has held us together as a Jewish nation for millennia. Why look for some new, convoluted path that always proves its inability to sustain and nourish the soul, the potential of the nation? Keep it simple. Keep focused on the goal. The true goal is the World to Come, but even in this world, the goals we seek are attainable if we but focus and concentrate on them with a simple approach. Serve God with simplicity and purity, pursuing no sophistication at all. This is the true goal. Never so much as open a book of philosophy. This is no part of the heritage of Jacob. All speculative philosophy contains the stumbling block of Amalek, which is calculated to make people fall. In one moment they can lose worlds. There is no greater evil.

Even books written by Jews which discuss speculative philosophy should be left alone, because they can harm the holy faith which is the root of everything. Thank God, we have many holy books today that are filled with sound guidance and the fear of God and are free of all speculation derived from

the so-called “wisdom” of the Greeks. They are firmly founded on the holy words of the Sages of the Talmud and the Midrash. In particular, there are the books [of the Kabbalah] based on the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Explore them and go through them again and again (Likutey Moharan II, 19). Reb Noson explains, “The reason why the Rebbe forbade us to read even the philosophical works that are unimpeachable on religious grounds is because they raise very difficult questions about the ways of God and go into them at length—but when they come to answer them, the explanations they give are very weak and easily pulled down. Anyone who studies these works and tries to answer the questions rationally can be led to atheism when he realizes later on that the explanation is completely inadequate, while the problem continues to trouble him.

“The Rebbe told us to rely only on faith. If someone finds he has questions about such matters, he should know that it is impossible to give any explanations, because with our human minds it is impossible to comprehend the ways of God. All we have is faith—we must believe that everything is certainly correct and right, only with our minds it is impossible to understand God’s ways” (Tzaddik #150). The Rebbe once laughed and said: “If they would allow one dead soul to visit an assembly of philosophers, that would be the end of all their teachings!” (Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom #226).

When we marry action to decision, our commitment to avoid sophistication and errant philosophies will be successful. Rebbe Nachman said: “I have a great longing to institute a rule that each person study a fixed amount in our sacred literature each day without fail.” He said that this should apply to those who are very far from holiness, even those who are caught in the evil trap and sin habitually, Heaven forbid. Still, the strength of the Torah is so great that it can free them from their habitual sins. If even the worst sinner would take upon himself a set practice to study a fixed amount every

day, he would be able to escape from the evil trap. The Torah's strength is so great that it can accomplish everything. A person's main goal should be to do good and serve God without sophistication. Every good and holy thing can be done with absolute simplicity. One can study much Torah, do much good, and spend much time in prayer, all without sophistication at all (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #19).

The Simple Man's Reward

Rebbe Nachman once said that God wins battles because of the simple folk who recite psalms with sincerity, and not because of those who use sophisticated means. He related this parable as an illustration: A king once went hunting disguised as a simple man so that he would have freedom of movement. Suddenly a heavy rain began to fall, literally like a flood. His ministers scattered in all directions, and the king was in great danger. He searched until he found the house of a villager. The villager invited the king in and offered him some groats. He lit the stove and let the king sleep on his pallet. This was very sweet and pleasant for the king. He was so tired and exhausted that it seemed as if he had never had such a pleasurable experience.

Meanwhile, the royal ministers searched high and low for the king, until they found him in this house. They wanted him to return to the palace with them. But the king said, "You did not even attempt to rescue me. Each one of you ran to save himself. But this man rescued me. Here I had the sweetest experience. Therefore, he will bring me back in his wagon, in these clothes, and he will sit with me on my throne" (Rabbi Nachman's Stories, Parable #21).

Before the coming of the Mashiach, Rebbe Nachman explains, the world will be flooded by atheism and immorality. This "flood" will come with such strength that it will even affect virtuous hearts, and no one will be able to fight it with any form of sophistication. All the "royal ministers" and leaders will be

scattered, and the entire kingdom will not stand firm on its foundations. The only ones who will uphold God's Kingdom will be the Jews who recite psalms in simplicity. When the Mashiach comes, they will be the ones to place the crown on his head.

Anger and Jealousy

To truly harness the energy of Gevurah, we must also control our anger. Like the process of tzimtzum which is a necessary prelude to any creation (see p. 29), the energy of Gevurah can give rise to new worlds, shaping and actualizing our thoughts. That same energy, used in the wrong way—for example, as an explosion of selfishness or self-aggrandizement—will drive our goal out of reach. An angry person operates with limited vision, losing focus of what he sees. All that he does see is the object of his anger, ignoring extenuating circumstances, other justifications, or even a plea for mercy on the part of the “culprit.”

The only way to keep our attention fixed on our goals is to transform anger into compassion (Likutey Moharan I, 18:2). When we feel ourselves becoming angry with someone, we should ensure we do nothing unkind, but rather show kindness. This channeling of the energy of Gevurah into Chesed binds us to a higher level beyond our feelings of the moment and lets us reach out to something that is currently beyond our level—i.e., our goal. Through this act we can even grasp a vision of the Ultimate Goal, the World to Come. When we overcome our anger, we draw down the spirit of Mashiach, and it is reckoned as if through us the world, and all that is in it, was created. We then merit a good livelihood, we can pray to God without any extraneous motivation, and we can bring from potentiality to actuality all the mitzvot and good deeds that we must fulfill (Likutey Moharan I, 66).

The Talmud teaches (Berakhot 61b), “The liver is angry.”

Rebbe Nachman explains that an overexcited person is one whose “liver” has taken control of his emotions and polluted

them, causing him to act like a wild beast. On the other hand, a person who controls his anger is at peace with himself. His most human side becomes apparent for all to see (Likutey Moharan I, 57:6). The liver is characterized this way because it must constantly toil at filtering and purifying the blood of the poisons which the body absorbs.

Similar to anger, jealousy can surge within a person and thrust him into a state of rage. The main difference between the two is that anger tends to dissipate after a while, but jealousy can persist and burn continuously, eating up a person's very self. Jealousy, like anger, is one of the most harmful characteristics a person can have, and diverts him from his goals.

Reb Noson notes that a good person—one who sees the good in himself and others and always tries to bring out the best in everyone—is represented by a beneficial eye (the attribute of Chesed). A jealous person—one who sees the bad in himself and others and arouses ill feeling, hatred and arguments—is represented by the “evil eye.” Notwithstanding his own good fortune, a jealous person will harbor ill will towards anyone who possesses even a fraction of what he has (Likutey Halakhot, Ha'Oseh Shliach Ligvot Chovo 3:11)

Yet jealousy, like anger, has a beneficial side. One who is jealous of another's wisdom, for example, and applies himself to attain that which he lacks, uses jealousy in a productive way. Our Sages extol the benefits of *kinas sofrim* (jealousy among scholars) for producing more and greater Torah thoughts (see Bava Batra 21a). We must apply our *Gevurah*—our ability to set boundaries in life—to learn when and where we can expend our energies in the most beneficial way, to establish the road to success, and to focus on and attain our goals.

The above is an expert from “[Hidden Treasures: Using Kabbalah To Discover Your True Potential](#)”

