

Reaching The 50th Gate: Week 3 – Beauty

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We have now entered the third 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.

Tiferet

Tiferet translates as beauty and represents the harmony and truth that can, and do, illuminate our lives. The Hebrew word tiPhERet shares the same root as the words Pe'ER (beauty) and PuRah (branches). In the array of the Sefirot we find Tiferet in the center column, branching out to the right and left sides, receiving from the upper Sefirot and transferring their bounty to the lower levels. This, in a sense, is the true beauty of Tiferet, which is able to unite and harmonize different energies and channel them in a manner that brings beneficence to all.

As a symbol of truth and unity, Tiferet also represents peace. We see this on a human scale when families or groups manage to live at peace with each other despite their differences. It is also evident on a Divine scale as God, Who is One, is at the same time the Ultimate Truth, the Ultimate Unity and the Ultimate Giver of Peace. Thus Tiferet manifests the peace that results from unity despite divergent approaches.

Tiferet is sometimes called Rachamim (Mercy) and sometimes Mishpat (fair and proper Judgment). Tiferet is therefore Merciful Judgment—judgment tempered with mercy. The function of a judge in a dispute is to adjudicate between contending parties and help them arrive at a peaceful settlement. Although we as individuals may perceive truth in different ways, a truly wise judge can help us to recognize, accept and even bridge the vast differences between us so that we can live in harmony. This is the manifestation of Tiferet.

Tiferet also corresponds to Torah study. Like Tiferet, the Torah has many “branches.” Starting with a single verse or phrase from Scripture, the commentators cull references from other parts of Torah to develop and reveal different shades of meaning and even new ideas in the original verse. Those familiar with the study of Torah—both its Written and Oral components, including the Kabbalah—are aware of the Torah’s

ability to guide a person from the first thought (i.e., teaching) towards a logical conclusion of the subject matter. What better way to learn how to grasp our own potential than by applying the analytical reasoning of God's Law to practical use?

Naturally, everyone claims to have the truth and, interestingly enough, every person does, in one way or another. We all have our own individual element or perspective of what truth is. As for the real core of truth—well, that's a different story. Rebbe Nachman's teachings on the subjects of truth, harmony and peace are concrete pillars that will help us master these attributes.

Once Reb Noson's family put pressure on him to accept a job offer as a rabbi in a certain town. Reb Noson was reluctant to take the position because it might interfere with his learning sessions with Rebbe Nachman. When he discussed the pros and cons with the Rebbe, the latter asked him, "Who else should be the rabbi? One who doesn't know the answers?" Reb Noson was taken aback. "Rebbe! Is that the truth? Should I take the job?" Rebbe Nachman replied, "Yes. That's the truth?" Hearing the inflection in the Rebbe's voice, Reb Noson persisted, "But Rebbe, is that the emeser emes (the real truth)?" Rebbe Nachman then answered, "No! The real truth is for you not to accept that position." (In this case, it would have hindered Reb Noson's spiritual growth.) Truth exists for everyone. But there is a core to the truth, and this is what we must seek out.

Rebbe Nachman addresses these variations in truth. "If my perspective is right, why listen to another? But can I be wrong? If so, what is the real truth? If truth is one, and I have at least an element of truth, then why am I confused? Why can't I find a simple solution? Why does darkness surround me?" The Rebbe answers: No matter what, you can encourage and fortify yourself with the truth, since truth is the light of God Himself and no darkness can obscure it. There is no

impurity or aspect of evil in the world that does not contain an opening through which you can escape— it is just that you do not see it because of the great darkness that prevails there. But through the truth, God Himself radiates light for you, and even in the depths you can see and will be able to find an opening of hope through which you can go out from darkness to light and truly draw close to God at all times (Likutey Moharan I, 112).

Thus, truth exists within everyone, but there are always obstructions. Let's take prayer as an example. As soon as we stand up to pray, we are often bombarded by extraneous thoughts and fantasies that take our minds far from where we want them to be. At such a time, Rebbe Nachman recommends, "The best remedy is to make sure that the words emerge from your lips in truth. Every word that comes from your mouth in truth and sincerity will provide you with an exit from the darkness which is trapping you, and then you will be able to pray properly. This is a fundamental principle whenever you are praying or meditating. You may feel unable to say a single word because of the intense darkness and confusion that hedge you in on all sides. But make sure that whatever you do say, you say as honestly and as truthfully as you possibly can. "For example, you could at least say truthfully the words, 'God, send help.' You may not be able to put much enthusiasm into the words, but you can still make yourself say them sincerely and mean what you say quite literally. The truth of your words will send you light and you will be able to pray, with the help of God" (Likutey Moharan I, 9:4).

Prayer is a "one-on-one" situation. There's God and there's you. God is right there, but how do you "know" it? How can you feel it? Try truth. Try honesty. Try to say the words as honestly as you can. Reach out to Him. Then you'll feel God reaching out to you. You are honest. God is Truth. They are one and the same. You are one and the same, merging with God, tapping into His Limitless Resources, His Limitless Potential.

And always know: "When you speak truthfully, you are blessed with Heaven's lovingkindness" (Aleph-Bet Book, Salvation and Miracles, A27). When you allow truth to permeate your inner being, you open up the flow of Chesed (Lovingkindness) from Above and create channels to receive that bounty and prepare for its transference to other people too. This ties in with another teaching: "Truth will bring the final redemption" (Aleph-Bet Book, Truth, B9). When man faces up to his responsibilities and is willing to accept the real truth, his potential can be realized. Rebbe Nachman adds, "The only way to come to truth is by drawing close to the true Tzaddikim and by following their advice without deviating from their words to the right or to the left" (Likutey Moharan I, 7:3). Tzaddikim are individuals who have already attained truth and know the importance of communicating that truth. We must be discerning, however: There are great people, Tzaddikim in their own right, who nevertheless have not attained absolute truth. As the Rebbe explains: Know! A true teaching from the mouth of the true Tzaddik, even in worldly matters, is more precious than the Torah teachings of another Tzaddik. This is because it is possible that in the Torah teachings of the other Tzaddik lies a great admixture. But the teachings that the true Tzaddik utters are nothing but truth. And because they are only truth, without any admixture, there is nothing more precious (Likutey Moharan I, 192:1).

Rebbe Nachman is telling us that there are many levels and perspectives of truth. Even good and righteous people might not have attained absolute truth. Therefore, we must keep searching, no matter what we think we've accomplished. This also applies to developing our potential, because we may think we've gone as far as we can without realizing that everyone has resources that haven't been tapped yet. Through honest searching, we can learn more about ourselves and our abilities than we ever thought possible. Torah Study Torah study is a vital tool in our pursuit. It enhances our perception of truth. Without Torah, it is impossible to live. At times you

can burn with a fiery passion for God, but the passion may be excessive and could engulf you completely. Torah study has the power to cool the flames and allow you to survive. There are other times when you can burn with a desire for the temptations of this world. The fire of these passions could burn your entire body. Learning Torah protects you from this. The fire within you becomes extinguished and you can live. Torah is the source of all true life (Likutey Moharan I, 78).

The Torah is a great Chesed of God: He gave us this guide to navigate through the vicissitudes of life. Additionally, the Torah's laws act as boundaries and parameters for life, so that Torah also parallels Gevurah. Its teachings come together in Tiferet (perfection, truth and harmony), as in (Psalms 19:8), "The Torah of God is perfect." For these reasons, Rebbe Nachman placed great emphasis on Torah study. "Steal time from your business and other activities in order to study Torah," he recommends. "Even if you are burdened with many obligations and duties, you cannot be so pressed that you cannot snatch some period each day to devote to Torah" (Likutey Moharan I, 284).

Attempt to go through all our sacred books in the course of your lifetime. You will then have visited every place in the Torah. The very rich constantly travel from land to land. They spend huge amounts just so that they should be able to say that they have been to some faraway place. You should likewise travel everywhere in the Torah. In the Future Life, you will be able to say that you have visited every place in our sacred literature. At that time, you will also remember everything you have ever learned (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #28).

Torah study should not be regarded as an unpleasant duty. One has to know how to look into it, and seek guides to navigate its byways. Rebbe Nachman suggests two additional approaches that can ease the transition and help one "taste" the sweetness of Torah. The first is to break your pride completely. Never take credit for yourself; give all the

credit to God alone. The second is to give charity, especially to charitable causes in the Land of Israel. This is the way to draw from the “mentality” of the Land of Israel and thereby taste the sweetness of Torah wisdom (Likutey Moharan II, 71). The importance of Torah study cannot be overstated. Rebbe Nachman says that all our prayers and requests are accepted in the merit of our learning. Moreover, Torah students are endowed with a special grace that makes others agree to fulfill their needs, whether material or spiritual (Likutey Moharan I, 1:1).

Remember, however, that “a person cannot merit Torah except through humility” (Likutey Moharan I, 14:4). When we attain any goal for which we’ve worked hard, it’s natural to feel pride in ourselves and our achievements. We must not let those feelings spill over into negating others. Humility, which is a prerequisite for the study of Torah, also goes hand in hand with Tiferet.

Here are some tips for achieving inner peace and harmony with others: Always be at peace with yourself. It is no good if the different aspects of your personality are in conflict with one another. Also aim for harmony in your relationships with the outside world. Regardless of whether things appear to be good or bad, always look for God in whatever happens to you. Do not allow yourself to be thrown off course by anything. Have faith that everything you experience day by day is a favor and a blessing. This applies even to your hardships and suffering. Believe and know that everything is for your ultimate good. Its sole purpose is to draw you closer to God, if you truly desire it. The same basic principle applies in your relationship with friends. Love them and be at peace with them regardless of their behavior, even if they make things difficult for you. Always judge them on the scale of merit and find good in them. Interpret everything in a good light and remind yourself that your friends’ intentions were not as bad as you imagined. It is very important to strive for relations

of love and peace with your friends and with all Israel. The way to achieve this is through the Torah, which is called “peace,” and through the Tzaddikim, who are also called “peace” (Likutey Moharan I, 33:1).

When peace exists between people, they speak with one another and consider together the ultimate purpose of this world and its vanities. They explain the truth to one another—that in the end nothing will remain of a person except what he prepared for himself for the World to Come. For, “Neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones nor pearls accompany a person at his death; only his Torah study and good deeds” (Avot 6:9). As a result of this honest dialogue, we can cast aside our false worship of money and draw ourselves closer to the truth, turning towards God, His Torah and spiritual work (Likutey Moharan I, 27:1-2).

Pursuing peace brings to trust in God. Truth promotes peace (Aleph-Bet Book, Peace and Tranquility, A5-6).