

Parshat Metzora and Shabbat HaGadol!

written by Refael Kramer

April 15, 2024



The Shabbat before Pesach is referred to by the sages as “Shabbat HaGadol,” the “Great Shabbat,” after the miracles performed on the Shabbat before the Exodus from Israel. This name continues to accompany us to this day, every Shabbat HaGadol the power of miracles is awakened again. Prepare yourself for the miracles of Shabbat HaGadol this year!

Dear Friends,

Pesach is approaching, and with your permission, just before you read this article, I want to share with you information

about the special project that we are involved with during these days, which is also related to Pesach. There is an ancient custom of helping families who find it financially difficult to celebrate the holiday as is fitting. This custom is known by our sages as "*ma'ot chitim*," enabling the poor to buy sufficient matzah. This is the fifth consecutive year that we at ***Machon Nahalat Tzvi, Breslov Research Institute***, which is run by my father and teacher, **Rabbi Chaim Kramer**, have been involved in this project, and thank G-d, for the last four years, [we have been privileged to bring great joy to hundreds of families](#), allowing them to celebrate the holiday with abundance and joy!

It is impossible to overstate the importance of this mitzvah, which involves many important mitzvos, such as giving charity, kindness, having mercy on others, and bringing holiday joy to the families who are in need of our help. The *gaba'im* of different *kehillot* here in the Holy Land have been calling us daily to ask for our help in supporting the less fortunate families in their communities, and we would really like to be able to help them. The extent to which we are able to help is dependent on all of our generosity and good will to get involved in donating to this cause.

We are currently [running a fundraising campaign](#). Thank G-d, as of this writing we have already raised \$100,000, which is about 70% of our goal. Every contribution that you make, and every effort adds up and enables us to reach out to more families and bring holiday joy to their homes.

Therefore, I am making a personal request that everyone should please join our [fundraising campaign now](#) and donate that amount so that together we will reach our goal in order to make many more precious families happy and enable them to be able to celebrate the Pesach Seder Night without worry and with a joyful heart.

I would like to personally thank each and every one of you in

advance—those of you who will happily respond wholeheartedly to my request which is not for my benefit, but solely for the benefit of the poor who stand before us all.

I will end with the blessing of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the Torah Deuteronomy 16:11, as elucidated by Rashi: “If you make mine happy, I make yours happy.” If we are considerate towards other and make an effort to bring happiness into their hearts, then G-d will do the same for us. May we all merit to celebrate the coming Pesach with our families with a happy heart, in security, and with peace and with great joy.

Yours sincerely,

Rafael Kramer

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To give – together and wholeheartedly!

The Torah portion of the week is *parshat Metzora*, and this year it falls on the Shabbat immediately before Pesach. As is well known, the Shabbat before Pesach is called “*Shabbat HaGadol*.” This week our discussion will be focused on the issue of *Shabbat HaGadol*, and why this Shabbat in particular

has been given this name.

As usual we will start with a wonderful Torah that Rebbe Nachman revealed:

All manner of suffering and all afflictions are due only to a lack of *daat*, meaning a lack of awareness and faith in Divine Providence, that G-d is running the world. And although there are afflictions that we cannot help but feel, such as the suffering caused by the soul's departure from the body after they had been so powerfully bound together. Even so, when a person has *daat* and understands that everything is under the providence of the Creator of the World, it is easier for him to cope, even with such difficult afflictions, and all the more so with other sufferings which one doesn't feel at all once he appreciates that everything is under G-d's control and that it is all for the best, as it is written "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away."

The problem begins with the fact that man falls under the influence of the "natural forces." He falls from his faith in G-d and believes only in the reality of his circumstances and in destiny. This is the main reason for the suffering of the people of Israel in exile since they are spread among the nations of the world and have learned from them to depend all on the forces of nature and destiny. In truth, the gentiles are indeed under the influence of nature and *mazal* (luck or fortune), but the Nation of Israel is higher than *mazal* and they are influenced by the Providence of the Creator alone. When they fall from their faith and think that everything depends on circumstance, then they have to undergo suffering and anguish from the nations of the world, meaning, when they fall from *daat*, it is inevitable that they will feel pain and suffering.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that when HaKadosh Baruch Hu wants to help the Nation of Israel to be saved from a nation that is causing them suffering, He draws down *daat*, a revelation of

faith in Divine Providence from “*sof ha’olam*”—the end of the world, meaning from the Providence which will exist “*l’atid lavo*,” in the world that will be in the future (in the End of Days) when everything will be only according to Divine Providence. Nowadays, it appears that everything is conducted according to natural means—operating only through the laws of nature. But in the future, everyone will know and understand that everything is run solely under the supervision of the Creator, and the forces of nature will all be nullified as it is written: “For the heavens shall vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment” (Isaiah 51:6).

When a person has daat and understands that everything is under the providence of the Creator of the World, it is easier for him to cope, even with such difficult afflictions!

Rebbe Nachman continues, explaining the concept that □□Divine Providence will have complete control at the End of Days and reveals how we can draw down this Providence to us even today. He teaches:

Prayer can change the course of nature. There is a natural system in place that is run according to its own rules, but we, the Nation of Israel, with our prayers, can change the course of nature. Each of us can remember a situation when he was in trouble, that according to the laws of nature, there was no possibility of salvation. And then, in a moment of truth, he prayed either a short or long prayer to G-d and the salvation came to him from an unexpected place which was completely beyond logic. This was possible because the fact is that there is a G-d in the world, and He runs the world not according to the laws of nature, but instead, the natural laws are subordinate to the Creator of the World who oversees and directs and leads creation according to His will.

Rebbe Nachman explains that Providence is called “great,” as in the verse: “For which *great* nation has G-d close to it, as

G-d our Lord is whenever we call out to Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7). This is the greatness of the Nation of Israel, that G-d, may his name be blessed, hears our prayers and changes nature for us. So too on the verse: "Please tell me all the *great* things that Elisha performed" (Kings II 8:4), the "greatness," the miracles that Elisha performed, were achieved through prayer, as our Sages teach, the only way one can change the laws of nature is through prayer, which is the aspect of miracles and Providence which is the opposite of nature. This is greatness, the aspect of something "great" (*Likutei Moharan I*, 250).

According to this explanation, Rabbi Natan explains why this Shabbat before Pesach is called *Shabbat HaGadol*:

All the miracles that took place in Egypt, where G-d completely changed nature with the ten plagues with which He afflicted the Egyptians, were the absolute opposite of the laws of nature. It was completely clear that G-d controls creation according to His will, and there are actually no laws of nature at all. For example, during the plague of blood, the water turned into blood, etc. From where did G-d draw down the revelation and the illumination of these miracles into the system of nature? From the Providence that will exist in the End of Days when everything will be run according to Divine Providence alone without any influence from the "laws of nature" at all. Therefore, the true source of the Exodus from Egypt is drawn from Shabbat, because Shabbat is called "a day that is completely good," which is the way that the world will be run in the End of Days when everything will behave only according to Divine Providence. And it is from there that G-d drew down the miracles from the End of Days to our world, to our days.

In other words, every miracle that happens here in this world is drawn from the world of the End of Days when the laws of nature will be abolished, and Divine Providence will be the only and the natural way that the world will run. (Oops, maybe

you noticed by the “natural” way we are used to talking about means that everything behaves “naturally.”) And from there, HaKadosh Baruch Hu draws down miracles and processes that are not according to the laws of nature, revealing that everything is under His control here in our present world as well.

And because Pesach itself is called “Shabbat,” as in the verse: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after Shabbat” (Leviticus 23:15 and Rashi there) which is referring to Pesach. This is because the main power and might of the holiday of Pesach comes from Shabbat, that is, in the way the world will be run in the End of Days. Therefore, on the Shabbat before Pesach, there is a revelation of the control of Divine Providence, a time of absolute miracles which is referred to as “*gadol*,” great, and is called “*Shabbat HaGadol*.”

These things, of course, are as relevant to our days and to the period we are living in, as they were during the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

We too are waiting every day for HaKadosh Baruch Hu to redeem us. We are all so looking forward to the coming of the Redeemer soon, but somehow, we have fallen into believing in the forces of nature, and it doesn't appear to us that the Redemption is on the horizon. We now believe in statistics and calculations which go according to logic. Why? Because that's what the media feeds us. They “teach” us how to think and how to explain everything.

But we do not need their explanations to understand the madness that is happening in the world. Only in the last two weeks, ten Jews have been killed in the Holy Land in serious terrorist attacks and a terrible war is going on between Russia and Ukraine that has dragged in the whole world to take sides. We are in a crazy system. From where will our salvation come? How can we escape and transcend this explosive and fragile way of living? We must remember that there is Divine

Providence in the world, as it will be in the future, when G-d will reveal His Providence unveiled, without disguising it under the laws of nature. From there we can also draw down upon ourselves, in this difficult time, the rulership of Divine Providence to rescue us from our difficult situation.

Please G-d, that we will merit to see miracles and wonders with the ingathering of the far-flung and distant Jews back to the Land of Israel and in the fulfillment of the verse: "As in the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders" (Micha, 7:15) *amen v'amen*.

(Based on *Likutei Halachot, Natilat Yadayim Shacharit* 2:7)

Mission: Rosh Chodesh Nissan

written by Ephraim Portnoy
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What if you want to prepare for Pesach properly through Torah study and prayer, but instead find that you need to be busy with cleaning and shopping?

Of course, you should try to grab time for Torah study in middle of everything you're busy with, and to be firm to daven at set times with a minyan.

But don't become overwhelmed by all the obstacles that you have to endure. They are there for a purpose, and they are actually the only reason why you're here in this world.

This can be understood with the analogy of a watch. In a watch, there is a spring which is bent backwards and naturally tries breaking free to jump forward, but is held back by the gears. The gears only allow the spring to be released forward bit by bit at the pace of seconds and minutes. If we would allow the spring the freedom to bounce forward straight away, the watch wouldn't be able to keep time. Many machines are made in this fashion, by taking two opposing forces and creating a harmony between them.

This is the purpose of man in this world. Naturally, a person's soul burns for Hashem. But Hashem wants us to declare His Kingship inside this world together with all of its problems and difficulties. Therefore He created an opposing force which separates a person and forcefully severs him from Torah and Tefilah and keeping his mind focused on a connection with Hashem. It's all in order that a person should live in a reality which prevents him from serving Hashem and hides Hashem from him, and from within this reality to free oneself forward little by little. He thereby pulls the "gears", the opposing force, with him to come closer to Hashem. Only in this way can we make wonderful Tikkunim above with our Avodas Hashem.

What should if you don't see yourself becoming free at all? Sometimes the force which is keeping us away from holiness is so strong that a person can become overwhelmed. It seems to him as if it's impossible to serve Hashem in the place where he is. But this is a mistake.

To go back to the analogy of the watch, it would be like a spring which is sometimes pulled back so strongly that it becomes bent and stops bouncing forwards. So too, the numerous obstacles can grab a person and bend him, until he gives in and says, "That's it, I can't!"

We have to know that there really aren't two equal forces which are standing opposite each other. The real stronger force is the natural pull that a person feels towards Hashem. Obstacles are only for the purpose of making a "vessel" and a "machine". You for sure have the ability to overcome everything.

It's just like gravity which holds on to everything in the world. When a person throws something he needs to break the hold of gravity which the world naturally has on that object. But that break is only temporary, because after the force of his throw is finished, the object is immediately pulled back

down.

We also have to remember that there's no such thing as "I'm not being allowed to serve Hashem." The Rebbe stands against this attitude and screams, "There is no such thing as despair!"

Remember who you are. Your soul is really always being pulled above. Whatever you can't do at this moment is only because of 'temporary' obstacles which are getting a hold of you. But you are stronger than them. You can't be entirely bent and broken. The more as you keep this in mind, the more you will strengthen your yearning and longing for Hashem.

You should therefore arouse a yearning for Avodas Hashem even at times when you are unable to actually serve Hashem. As much as you will pull yourself forward, you will merit freeing points of holiness for yourself little by little. Not only will you practically be able to grab many Mitzvos and much good, but even with the yearning itself you elevate the entire world to Hashem.

For example, if you have to go out into the street to take care of things, or you are standing on a ladder cleaning or plastering and you remind yourself that the only thing you want is to be close to the Creator, you have just sanctified the street or the ladder. Places which are usually in the dominion of anxiety and anger or just plain materialism, you are pulling with you into holiness, just like the spring in the watch which controls the gears.

What do you have out of pulling the obstacles into holiness? You've built a Mishkan in your heart, a Sanctuary for Hashem. This is why it's called a "MiSHKaN", because it's "MoSHeKh", the pull of gravity through which you bring G-dliness into everything which is hiding Hashem from you.

Don't say that these are concepts which are too high for you. Mishkan is also a "MaSHKoN", a security with which Hashem

promised that He will always be with us even we sin. This is why Hashem gave us the Mishkan after we fell into the sin of the Egel, the Golden Calf, to remind everyone that Hashem dwells upon each individual. You have the ability to arise and to rectify all situations in your life, if you will just draw yourself forward with a yearning for Hashem.



Everything depends on humility. When a person keeps in mind that he only wants to honor Hashem and doesn't think about his own personal success, and the more he makes himself like dust, he merits that Hashem says "I will dwell by the downtrodden." His faith that Hashem dwells with him is strengthened. He starts to understand that everything that he's going through is a mission and an appointment from the King, that the King Himself has sent him to conquer and annex distant territories into the realm of holiness, to build another Mishkan in the desert, in a place of snakes and scorpions, by being strong to pull himself forward from the forces which are holding him back.

This is what we are praying for when we say, "Let my soul be like dust for everyone." We should merit being like the ground which has the power of gravity to pull everything to it.

How do we get this ability? As we said, the building of the Mishkan was through Klal Yisroel. Each person brought his own portion. Everyone has his own unique mission through which the Divine Presence dwells in this world, according to his own personal trials.

But even after the Mishkan was ready, they needed Moshe to erect it. The Tzaddik is the foundation of the world. He has reached true humility until he has literally become like dust, having the gravity to pull Hashem into this world and to pull the whole world to Hashem.

The more we become closer to Tzaddikim, study their Sefarim and give charity to the poor, we merit truly being drawn after Hashem and to draw all our surroundings and all our obstacles and concealments into holiness, to bring the Divine Presence to dwell below.

Now is the time. "Rosh Chodesh Nissan is the Rosh Hashanah for kings." Everyone in Klal Yisroel now receives his appointment for the coming year in order to receive new abilities to draw G-dliness into our trials and obstacles.

Based on LKM I 70, LKH Yom Tov 5

How Will We Know Who to Bring Close? – Parshat Vayakhel

written by Refael Kramer
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Every person is obligated to bring others closer to the Creator, but how do we know who to bring close and who not? This is the subject of this week's parsha lesson.

This week's Torah portion is *Parshat Vayakhel*. In the *parsha*, Moses gathers the people to teach them about the *terumah* (contribution to) and the construction of the *Mishkan*. But before this, he warned them about observing the laws of Shabbat: "Six days work may be done, but the seventh day you shall sanctify, a day of complete rest to the L-rd; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day" (Exodus 35:2-3).

There are two perplexing things in this *parsha*. First, what is the connection between being careful to keep the laws of Shabbat and the construction of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle)? Second, if it is forbidden to do any work on Shabbat, why did the Torah need to point out that it is forbidden to light a

fire on Shabbat? Our Sages explained: "He [Moses] prefaced [the discussion of the details of] the construction of the *Mishkan* with the warning to keep the Sabbath, denoting that it [i.e., the building of the *Mishkan*] does not override the Sabbath" (Rashi). And regarding the necessity to enumerate separately the prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat, our Sages taught that either it is to teach that it is just a regular prohibition as opposed to other types of labor on Shabbat, for which one gets capital punishment, or it was singled out to divide the various labors, i.e., to establish liability for capital punishment for each and every one of them (*Sanhedrin* 35b).

Either way, we know that there is no mitzvah that cancels the laws of Shabbat except for mitzvot that must be done at a set time, for example, *brit milah* (circumcision). The Torah designates this mitzvah for the eighth day after the birth of a male child. It doesn't matter which day of the week the eighth day falls out on, and therefore, we perform a *brit milah* even on Shabbat. However, the work of building the *Mishkan* is not considered a *melachah* that is time-dependent, so why should we think that we might have to desecrate Shabbat in order to build it? Why then was it necessary to warn us that it would not push off the laws of Shabbat?

To understand this, we will learn a wonderful idea that sheds light on this issue:

Every Jew has a duty to bring people closer to the Creator, no matter who they are. Each person has his own good point which he can share with another person to help him draw closer to the Creator. When a person brings people closer to the Creator, he builds the "*Heichal HaKodesh*." The word "*kodesh*" (holiness) refers to people coming closer to perfect *yirah* (fear and awe of G-d) and holiness. The word "*Heichal*" refers to honor, as it says in the verse: "in His *Heichal*/Temple everyone speaks of His glory" (Psalms 29:9). The Creator is honored when those who are far away from Him come closer to

Him.

However, when a person draws others closer, it can happen (G-d forbid) that the evil in those who are in the process of drawing closer to G-d will grab hold of him and will knock him down from the levels he has achieved. The advice for this is that the person should judge his actions well, and he should uproot the evil from within himself, and through this, his heart will burn to come close to G-d. And this fire will then burn and consume the evil of those he is bringing closer so that it will not be able to get a grip on him. This process, in which the power of evil is consumed through one judging himself, is the same as observing the Shabbat, which, as is known, eliminates the evil that clings to the six days of the week (as mentioned in the Zohar: "You shall keep My Shabbatot, which is a circle with a square inside it" (*Likutei Moharan* I, 59). Through the circle and the square within it, the forces of evil are nullified, and the holiness of Shabbat is protected. Rebbe Nachman equates the circle to a chair as in the verse: "the top of the throne was circular" (Kings I, 10:19), and it is known that a chair is an expression of honor, as, it is said: "*Kisei HaKavod*," the Throne of Honor. The square is equated to the judgment that a person judges himself, as in the verse: "It shall be square and folded over double," which refers to the *Choshen HaMishpat*, the breastplate (Exodus 28:16).

The work of building the Mishkan is not considered a melachah that is time-dependent, so why should we think that we might have to desecrate Shabbat in order to build it?

With reference to what we have mentioned above, Rabbi Natan clarifies this subject in connection to our *parsha* in a wondrous way: the work of the building of the *Mishkan* and its vessels is essentially the same work as bringing people closer to the Creator. According to the way that the *Mishkan* was erected, the physical structure whose main purpose was for the

Heichal (sanctuary) which was before the *Kaporet*, which was the place of the *Aron* (Ark), where the *Shechina* dwelled. So too with regard to spirituality, the *Heichal HaKadosh*, the Holy Sanctuary, was built by Moses, bringing everyone closer and bringing them back in *teshuvah* (repentance), and thereby the glory of G-d was revealed in the world.

It was therefore conceivable that Shabbat could have been pushed off in order to build the *Mishkan*, because just as Shabbat nullifies evil, so too does the building of the *Mishkan*. Therefore, Moses first warned them to keep Shabbat in order to teach them that the building of the *Mishkan* does not push off the laws of Shabbat. That is, the power of building the *Mishkan* to destroy evil originates *davka* in observing Shabbat, through stopping all work because refraining from work on Shabbat symbolizes a complete *bitul* (self-annulment) to the *Ohr Ain Sof* (the Infinite Light), which is the ultimate resting and refraining from work.

In order to understand these things better, we will add a further explanation:

All the work that we do in this world is to make spiritual clarifications. Good and evil are mixed together, and it is our task to subdue the evil and to separate the good from within it, and we thereby rectify the entire creation. This is why we work during the six days of the week: to make spiritual clarifications. Through our behavior in every act of work and in every business transaction, there are clarifications being made. However, this is only the work of the six weekdays, before Shabbat arrives, so that on Shabbat there will be a complete cessation of this work without any clarifications. The final stage takes place on Erev Shabbat (Friday). As the Holy Arizal (Rabbi Yitzhak Luria) explains, this is the hidden reason that we bathe in hot water on Erev Shabbat: to burn and destroy the evil that clings to the six weekdays.



The advice for this is that the person should judge his actions well, and he should uproot the evil from within himself!

Now we can gain a better understanding of this topic. It is true that the building of the *Mishkan* is a wonderful clarification that separates out and annihilates evil, similar to Shabbat during which evil is nullified, but even so, Shabbat is on a higher level. The wonderful power that is involved in building the *Mishkan* to clarify and nullify evil originates in the holiness of Shabbat, in the wonderful cessation brought in by the Shabbat during which all labor ceases completely, without any further clarifications being done, not even clarifications of the holiness like the building of the *Mishkan*, but only a complete, holy, and pure rest.

Let us now return to the question we asked previously: If the Torah has forbidden us to do any kind of work on Shabbos, why does it have to mention specifically not to light a fire? Now that we have the explanation of Rabbi Natan, everything becomes bright and clear: All the clarification and rectification enabled by all the various labors are done

through the agency of the fire of judgment, which burns up and annihilates the evil. This is why the Torah emphasizes “You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day,” that we have no power through the strength of the fire of judgment to do any clarifications on Shabbat, not even clarifications within the holiness like building the *Mishkan* or the *Heichal HaKodesh*. Even these highest levels of holy work do not cancel the laws of Shabbat. The contrary, it is actually the resting on Shabbat that enables the clarifications of the holiness to be accomplished on the six weekdays – the building of the *Mishkan*.

Rabbi Natan adds that the *Zohar* teaches that the *Tzaddik HaEmet*, the true tzaddik, is an aspect of “Shabbat,” just as the holy *chavurah* (group) of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai’s followers said to him: “*Ant hu Shabbat d’colhu yomi*” (translation: “You are the Shabbat of all the days”). Practically speaking, the work of bringing people closer to the Creator is extremely complex and difficult. Who can testify about himself that he has merited a completely rectified fire of judgment – that he can judge himself properly until he has the power to eradicate all the evil that clings to him, and all the more so that clings to other people? In addition, Rebbe Nachman taught that there are certain people who it is forbidden to draw close at all, as there is not enough power in the fire of justice to eradicate their evil, and because of this, it is difficult to know when one should attempt it, and who a person should try to draw close, and who it is forbidden to draw close.

Because we cannot know on our own how, when, and who to draw close, Rabbi Natan teaches that since there is no possibility of knowing how to act regarding this matter, and if regarding any matter one has an obligation to pray that he should know how to act, then it is especially true regarding this matter on which all the worlds depend.

Therefore, the main building of the “*Heichal HaKodesh*” is

through the True Tzaddik. Only by the power of the Tzaddik, who is the aspect of Shabbat, who is completely pure like the resting on Shabbat, which is a complete nullification to the *Ohr Ain Sof* (the Infinite Light) – when the *Shechinah* rests and there are no clarifications effected and there is complete nullification of the *klippot* (forces of evil) – only through his power can people be drawn closer, and can the *Mishkan* and the “*Heichal HaKodesh*” be built as is fitting.

(Based on *Likutei Halachot, Ta'arovot* 5:5)

It's Not a Failure, it's a Challenge! – Parshat Vayeitzei

written by Refael Kramer
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This week's Torah portion is parshat Vayeitzei. From all the wondrous stories in the parsha we will focus on Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah and the birth of their children. There are many interesting points contained in this story. We will embark on a fascinating journey of discovering them.

The main points addressed in the *parsha* are as follows: First there is Jacob's departure from Be'er Sheva, where his father Isaac lived, and his journey to Charan. Then comes his famous dream of a ladder placed on the ground and with its top reaching to the sky and the angels of G-d ascending and descending on it. The next topic deals extensively with the flocks: giving Lavan's flocks to drink, Jacob's work with Lavan's flocks, the increase and growth of the size of Jacob's flocks as well as watering them and raising them, and of course at the center of the *parsha* is Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah and the birth of the twelve tribes.

The other notable topic throughout the *parsha* is Lavan's cunning behavior. He constantly deceived and exploited Jacob until the time when God commanded Jacob to return to the land of his fathers, and then he fled with his wives and children. Lavan pursued Jacob and only G-d Himself was able to prevent him from harming Jacob. And this takes us to the end of the *parsha*.

We will now go into the details and discover a delightful message in the *parsha* in light of one of Rabbi Nachman's wonderful teachings. Rabbi Nachman teaches:

Every person has a heart of stone, a certain "capriciousness" that he must break. A heart of stone is a symbol of the delusions and self-deceptions that prevent a person from drawing closer to the Creator. The Torah forbids using an iron instrument to chisel the stones used to build the Temple. Our sages tell us that when King Solomon wanted to build the Temple, he used the "*shamir*" worm to cut the stones which he obtained from Ashmadai, the king of the demons. Like the "*shamir*" worm, anyone who wants to make himself into a holy sanctuary must break his heart of stone. A heart of stone is a representation of the evil inclination which is known as the "power of imagination." These are the delusions and deceptions that prevent a person from attaining holiness. Similar to the peel that surrounds and envelops the fruit, so that there is no way of reaching the fruit without removing the peel, so are a person's false imaginings and delusions. They are the "*klippot*" that surround holiness which prevent a person from reaching holiness. When a person breaks the impulsiveness of his heart and his power of imagination—even though he still has work left to do—his mind can already fully enlighten him.

These delusions ("*klippot*") exist in every world and on every level. Even a person who has already overcome his low-level imaginations ("*klippot*") from the past, when he progresses spiritually and ascends to a higher level, he will be tested again with a new set of false imaginations and *klippot* that

will hinder him from drawing closer to holiness. This can cause a lot of frustration, because he can make the mistake of thinking that he has fallen and lost everything he has already achieved. This is why Rabbi Nachman warns us and teaches: "About this, many *chassidim* make a mistake when suddenly it seems to them that they have fallen in their service of G-d. In truth, it is not a fall at all but merely a sign that they need to go up another level. This is when the *klippot* of one's desires are reawakened and strengthened again, with all kinds of confusion, and preventions, imaginings, and bad thoughts. Therefore, one has to overcome them anew each time and to return, subdue, and break the *klippot* and the impediments on each and every level. But this is not a sign that a person has fallen from his level at all "(*Likutei Moharan* I, 25).

Like the "shamir" worm, anyone who wants to make himself into a holy sanctuary must break his heart of stone."

Now we will embark on a wonderful spiritual journey to understand the *parsha* in light of the words of Rabbi Natan:

"And Jacob left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan" (Genesis 28:10). "Be'er Sheva" symbolizes holiness. Each spiritual level is included in the seven lower *Sefirot* (Divine emanations). The Hebrew word "*Charana*" (meaning "to Charan") represents "*charon af*" (anger), because the *klippot* contain strict judgments which are "*charon af*." Jacob rose up from the spiritual level he was on to progress to the next spiritual level, but that caused the *klippot* on that higher level to awaken in the form of all kinds of difficulties, and suddenly "the sun darkened for him." This means that the light, which is the aspect of the mind, suddenly darkened for Jacob. Despite this, Jacob persevered and remained steadfast in holiness, as it is written: "He came to the place and slept there" (Genesis 28:12). He merited to happen upon "the place," i.e., the Holy of Holies. In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder placed on the ground with its top reaching up to heaven with

the angels of G-d ascending and descending on it. This is a hint to the order of creation. A person must climb and ascend, step by step, and when he reaches a higher level, the difficulties will be reawakened. And there are those who can, G-d forbid, fall down from this. Our sages relate that the sun set for him sooner than it was supposed to according to the laws of nature. Thus, they hinted that the reason the sun had set was not because he had fallen from his spiritual level but because he had ascended to a higher spiritual level and his self-deceptions and difficulties had resurfaced. This is what Jacob expressed in admiration when he awakened from his sleep, and said: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). That is, it is not as I thought, that my becoming distant from the Creator was what caused the darkening of Divine light, because in truth, the presence of G-d was found there. The darkness was created only because I had progressed to a higher level and had to break the delusions which were reawakened.

After Jacob had himself gone through the process and merited reaching the high level of the "Holy of Holies," Jacob went "*artzah b'nei Kedem*"—"towards the land of the people of the East" (Genesis 29:1) to draw closer the lofty souls who fell "*artzah*"—"to the earth" and return them "*kedem*"—"before" the Creator, as in the verse, "*Chadesh yemeinu k'kedem*"—"Renew our days as of old" (Lamentations 5:21). Jacob saw three flocks of sheep near the well and a large stone covering the well. The "well" symbolizes the waters of knowledge and the sweetness of the Torah. The "stone" symbolizes the "heart of stone" blocking the well, preventing anyone from drinking the water and advancing to a higher spiritual level. "The shepherds together with the flocks of sheep" hint at all the retreating backwards of those who feel frustrated by the feeling of distance they experience which they do not understand is due to the difficulties that reoccur every time anew, every time they go up a level. Jacob spoke to them: "My brothers, where are you from?" That is, you are my brothers, and you deserve

to drink from the waters of the well so you can move forward. But they replied to him “We are from Charan.” They admitted that they were not able to roll off the stone, that is, to remove the spiritual blockages that arise from “Charan”—from the klippot “charon af”— “anger” which are continually being awakened anew.



In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder placed on the ground with its top reaching up to heaven with the angels of G-d ascending and descending on it.

At this stage, Jacob realized that the main blockage is the “heart of stone,” the “power of the imagination” which originated in Lavan *HaArami*. Lavan the Aramite, as his name implies, was a deceiver and a swindler. For seven years he enslaved Jacob, and in return he explicitly pledged to give him his daughter Rachel as a wife, and after cheating on him and giving him Leah in place of Rachel, he further dared to present the situation as if Jacob is the one who was being unfair by asking for the younger before the elder. Jacob asked the shepherds: “Do you know Lavan the son of Nahor?” They answered: “We know him” (Ibid 29:5). They sadly admitted to Jacob that they were aware that the reason they were unable to

remove the heart of stone was because of the influence of the Lavan *HaArami* who had mislead everyone with the power of his deceptions. When Jacob saw how Lavan had deceived them, he rolled the stone off on his own for them. Jacob's whole desire was to give everyone access to the waters of knowledge and restore the souls of Israel so that they could each achieve their rectification. Jacob rolled off the heart of stone from the mouth of the well like someone who easily pulls a cork out of a bottle. Because after Jacob himself went through the process, he had the power to reveal to others the way to be saved from the delusions of Lavan, from the deception of the "heart of stone."

And so, throughout the *parsha*, Jacob is able to overcome Lavan each time: both when he tricked him and switched his daughters and also when Lavan cheated him a hundred times in his work with Lavan's flocks. Jacob's endless work with the flocks of Lavan mentioned in the *parsha* hints at the future generations. When Jacob saw that there was no hope that those souls would be able to deal with Lavan's deceit, he fled from there so that the future generations would be able to live far from such lies and fantasies. But even then, Lavan chased after them. As we have already described, the deceptions and imaginings do not cease, but rather new ones come and envelop a person all the time. Then when G-d saw the self-sacrifice of the tzaddik to save the Nation of Israel and guide them on the true path, G-d Himself intervened and warned the evil Lavan: "That's enough! Beware of speaking with Jacob either good or bad!"

This is the explanation of Jacob's words when he answered Lavan: "I was [in the field] by day when the heat consumed me, and the frost at night" (Ibid, 31:40). That is, "I have labored and toiled very much in prayer and *hitbodedut* and Torah study day and night, in the immense heat and in the freezing cold of night, with tremendous efforts in serving G-d—everything I am doing is for G-d, to draw close the souls of

Israel. Thus, even though they have not yet won the war, you do not have the power to do any damage to them due to my power and the power of my forefathers, the true tzaddikim, which will protect them and will save them from you, because G-d Himself will help me until I finish with them that which I began: to bring them all close to G-d, as it is written: "God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, and He reproved you last night (Ibid 31:42).

(Based on *Likutei Halachot*, *Matana* 4:12-14).

Make Hitbodedut Wherever You Find Yourself

written by Chaya Rivka Zwolinski
April 15, 2024



In Parsha Chayei Sarah, we learn that Yitzchak went out to pray in the fields towards evening time, to pray the evening prayers. Yitzchak's evening prayers took the form of *hitbodedut*, which is speaking to Hashem in your own words, from the heart, about whatever is on your mind.

Hitbodedut can include questions, confession and remorse, gratitude, yearning, beseeching, venting, praise, frustration – whatever it is that you need to express. Just like Yitzchak, we can tap into the power of *hitbodedut* and talk to Hashem. We should talk to Hashem with honesty; after all, no one knows our thoughts and feelings better than Hashem. Who better to discuss them with?

Yitzchak was making *hitbodedut* in a field. Rebbe Nachman tells us it is quite good and beneficial to pray out of doors, in the fields and the forests, surrounded by nature. He tells us that when we do all the trees and plants of the field join in. All the plants and animals sing Hashem's praises. Because they do so, they invigorate our own prayers.

In Perek Shira we learn that the vegetation and grasses sing: "May the glory of God endure forever, let God take joy from His creation." This is what the vegetation and grasses are singing alongside you when you make *hitbodedut* out of doors.

But, we don't always have the opportunity to talk to Hashem in a natural setting, or in a safe place out of doors. Very often we might find we have to make *hitbodedut* in a corner of our bedroom, in a car or on public transportation. We wish we could always pray and meditate in a beautiful outdoor setting.

It's helpful to remember: Just as Hashem created you and gave you everything you need in life, He also gave you the ability to talk to Him wherever you find yourself. Hashem knows that you may not have the beautiful natural setting or a lot of time, you may not have peace and quiet that is perfectly conducive to the ultimate *hitbodedut* experience. Hashem wants

us to know that there's time and space, whenever and wherever you find yourself. It's up to you.

May you have a day in which you work with what Hashem gives you.

The Pattern Of Our Lives

written by breslov.org

April 15, 2024



Do you often wonder when you will finally be able to catch your breath? Do you ever say to yourself, "I thought I was finally done with these issues"? Well, life isn't so easy after all. But this is also nothing new; in fact, Abraham had some very difficult life issues of his own.

Famine: There is a famine in Canaan. Abraham is forced to

leave his land and go down to Egypt where his beautiful wife, Sarah, is abducted by Pharaoh himself. In the end, they return to Canaan, unharmed and enriched from Pharaoh's coffers.

Infertility: Abraham is forced to wait many, many years until his righteous wife Sarah, at age 90, miraculously gives birth. Abraham is promised that that his spiritual legacy will be brought to fruition through this newborn – Isaac.

Child sacrifice: Abraham is asked to sacrifice his long awaited, precious son, Isaac. At the last moment, a ram takes the place of Isaac. Abraham immediately begins to think about Isaac's future and finding a soul mate for him. He receives news that Rebecca has just been born, but Isaac is 37 years old!

Wife's death: Abraham returns home from the challenge of his life. He and Isaac are both "in one piece," but Sarah has just passed away. While in mourning, Abraham is forced to negotiate for the special burial place of the Cave of Machpeilah from a very evil person named Ephron HaChiti. After paying a tremendously exaggerated asking price, he successfully buries his wife.

Shidduchim: Now Abraham must arrange this fitting match for his prized son. He sends his trusted servant Eliezer on mission impossible across the civilized world to get Rebecca away from the hands of her evil and conniving brother, Laban.

Do you see a pattern here? Every time Abraham felt his salvation had come, he was again tested with a different, unique challenge. He was never given "time off" and never arrived at some kind of spiritual finish line.

Webster's Dictionary defines life as "the ability to grow, change, etc., that separates plants and animals from things like water or rocks." The Talmud states that sleep is one-sixtieth of death (*Berakhot* 57b). Sleep means a lack of spiritual consciousness or awareness – this lack is akin to

death. In order to LIVE life, we mustn't be sleeping like a rock; rather, every challenge gives us the opportunity to grow and experience true change.

The pattern of Abraham's life is our pattern as well. Whether in our personal growth or in more mundane matters, we each confront difficult moments and issues. When we begin to see our salvation, we thank God that we are free or that we have been successful. Although certainly we have experienced God's kindness and should express our gratitude, we should also know that we aren't done just yet. Yes, we have grown, we have experienced true closeness and deliverance from our Creator – but we are still very distant from the ultimate salvation.

God's greatness is unfathomable (Psalms 145:3). Every single day is unique and special; every day is blessed with kindness and deliverance. At every moment, in His great wisdom, God seeks to bring us closer to our ultimate potential. His desire is for us to be spiritually compatible with Him. As we experience the difficulties of life, we can keep our cool by having realistic expectations. While we must reinforce our strength and our vision of success by appreciating our triumphs, at the same time, we need to take a step back and realize that we are in this for the long run. There are no easy answers, but there is an awesome Master plan.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Shiluach HaKen 5

YOUR PLANET HAS BEEN RECALLED

written by Ozer Bergman
April 15, 2024



How can we clear the air and start anew? What's the solution? Rebbe Nachman gave us that the key!

We Jews, and the rest of the world for that matter, often forget that we weren't always the Chosen People. When this little old world of ours started, God wanted everyone to be Jewish (Derekh HaShem 2:4). That means every member of the human race, through good works and prayer, could have provided God with hitpa'arut (pride).

Didn't happen. From the moment Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge, the world rolled downhill at a rapid clip. In the span of just ten generations, mankind not only failed to provide God with hitpa'arut, but they made Him regret the whole enterprise: "God regretted that He made humankind...He was pained in His heart" (Genesis 6:6). That's anti-hitpa'arut, at its worst. God renounced His own creation in no uncertain terms (ibid., 6:7).

What were people doing that was so antithetical to God's hope

for His creations? Rebbe Nachman teaches that the key element for bringing people, including oneself, to true emunah (faith) is peace and friendship. When we share with one another—and especially when we give tzedakah (charity) properly— we create an oasis of tranquility with another human being. The more people we give to, the larger the oasis we create. (The better we give, the more tranquil and clean the oasis air.)

The Generation of the Flood constantly stole from one another. One of the most pernicious methods of theft they employed, called chamaz, was taking less than a penny's worth of merchandise from vendors. "It's such a trifle, less than a penny. There's no harm in that." Of course, there was also no legal recourse for the merchant, so people could get away with it.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the key element for bringing people, including oneself, to true emunah (faith) is peace and friendship!

Nu. Do you think this made the vendors happy? Instead of fostering an attitude of societal cooperation and friendship, people disliked one another—and caused God to dislike them (Bereishit Rabbah 31:1)! Their dislike was neither passive nor silent. It was proactive and vociferous (ibid., 31:4). In stealing one another's money and peace of mind, they called upon themselves their own destruction.

The attitude of chamaz carried over into other areas of life. As Rebbe Nachman teaches in Sefer HaMidot (Geneivah u'Gezeilah A:1), once a person permits himself to steal from others, he opens the door to every type of sin. The chamaz of theft developed into the chamaz of murder, idolatry and sexual immorality (Bereishit Rabbah 31:6).

Which is not surprising. What's common to all of the above-mentioned evils is their divisiveness. Their inception—the thought of doing them—comes only if a person feels

disconnected, “other,” from his intended victim.* Their execution—actually doing them—not only actualizes the distance and otherness between perpetrator and victim, it also moves them from the private domain to the public, introducing distance and otherness into the minds and hearts of the people of their community. They poison society’s atmosphere.

What’s the solution? How can we clear the air and start anew?

Floods are not only impractical, they are also extremely unpleasant. Instead, it’s a better idea to give away, rather than hoard. Rebbe Nachman quotes the verse “Wealth adds many friends” (Proverbs 19:4). It seems that millionaires have millions of friends, but those friends are interested in the money, not the one who has it. The genuine wealth that truly adds—produces—genuine affection is the tzedakah that one gives away. The money you give to tzedakah and the friendships you gain thereby are your true wealth (Bava Batra 11a).

When one sows concern, it grows into a circle, a community and a society of people who take care of one another. People feel and are safe, physically and emotionally. Their security and (subconscious) awareness of the oneness that they constitute open their ears to hear the true meaning of what tzaddikim teach, the love and awe of God. That’s hitpa’arut!

*Even though idolatry seems to be victimless, it is not.

(Based on Likutey Moharan I:17)

How can I be happy when the

Jewish nation is sad and mourning?

written by Meir Elkabas
April 15, 2024



Hoshana Rabbah usually marks the culmination, the ‘sealing’ of the final Divine Judgment for every Jew. The actual decision is given out from Heaven on Hoshana Rabbah.

Simchat Torah is another chance for us, an opportunity to continue. Rebbe Nachman, for instance, explains that during the evening prayer on Simchat Torah, after the Shema, when we recite “emet ve’emuna,” a person’s parnasa (livelihood) for the year is determined.

However, this year, Hashem didn't waste any time. On Simchat Torah in Eretz Yisrael, tragedy struck. Pogroms, and the loss of Jewish lives – over 1300 Jews were killed or went missing. We haven't seen such a magnitude of suffering since the Holocaust. Tiny troubles here and there are nothing compared to this. Eretz Yisrael is in turmoil; people are deeply saddened.

It's evident that Hashem wants us to awaken, to do teshuva (repentance), and that Mashiach is on his way. But what am I supposed to do? I feel utterly broken. The media only makes it worse. Images of Jewish children in Gaza being kidnapped and mistreated, or the sight of grieving parents looking for their missing children – the pain is excruciating. It's not just compassion for those in distant lands; it's our own people suffering.

So, here's the question: how can I find happiness when Am Yisrael, our nation, is in mourning? You might think, 'Don't be happy.' But that's exactly what the oppressors want. Reb Noson writes that the nation's main goal in exile is to make us sad. Even watching Holocaust videos, the typical reaction is sadness. Sometimes the damage to our happiness is greater than the benefit. You have to weigh carefully. When we're mourning, if we get too sad and can't serve Hashem properly, it's not worth it.

Rebbe Nachman was clear – 'it's a great mitzvah to always be happy'. You can't serve Hashem if you're not happy. Depression and sadness are the main tools of the yetzer hara (evil inclination) in exile. And now, when we're bombarded with depressing news on social media, it's harder than ever to stay upbeat. I have to be a part of my Jewish nation, but not on condition to feed the inner yetzer hara that thrives on sad news. It's absurd and dangerous, and they're doing a good job at it.

People are questioning how Hashem could allow this? It's a

challenging time, and we're trying to understand what's happening.

Let's begin with the fact that these events occurred on Simchat Torah (in the Holy Land). This already gives us a hint. Simchat Torah is one of the most joyous days of the year, a day when we are meant to be happy. Rebbe Nachman himself once expressed that he had experienced such profound joy on one Simchat Torah that he danced alone, even in the solitude of his room. Reb Noson, in various places, expressed his own ability to recall the true Simchat Torah joy many times during the year.

There is no greater joy than understanding and appreciating one's Yiddishkeit. The greatest joy is being a Jew, knowing you possess eternal meaning, value, and worth. Every mitzvah creates an eternal connection that cannot be erased by sin or misdeeds. This connection is even more enhanced when tzaddikim enter the picture, bringing us closer to Hashem. Everything we do, from wearing Tefillin to observing Shabbat and giving Tzedakah, takes on a new level of significance.

Depression and sadness are the main tools of the evil inclination

The main attack targeted a gathering of approximately 3,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 30 attending a secular festival. These youths were seeking joy and happiness. They were smoking drugs and looking for happiness outside of Torah observance. Whether they were not religious from birth or came from religious families with a strict and joyless approach to their education, they were all seeking "happiness", but who probably never tasted the true joy of Mitzvot.

What followed was profoundly painful.

The Torah in Parshat Ki Tavo, warns of the curses, including the taking of hostages of sons and daughters. The reason given

for these punishments is that we failed to serve Hashem with joy and gladness. The text reads, '[All this will befall you]... because you did not serve Hashem, your Lord, with joy and a glad heart.' The consequence is the raping and killing of our children, the most painful of all.

So, why is this happening? The answer is simple—it's because we're not serving Hashem with joy. This is a wake-up call about joy. These events occurred on Simchat Torah, a day meant for happiness. Hashem didn't wait for another day. And what is our response? It's not to be sad or worried. Instead, based on Rebbe Nachman's teachings, when such things happen, we must increase our joy, work towards it, and seek greater Simcha.

Reb Noson says that the most powerful weapon to overcome the sadness of exile, suffering, and pain – which we are experiencing today on a clear level – is to connect our vision to the ultimate future. We need to realize that, in the end, Hashem will have His way, and evil will be punished, eradicated, and destroyed. The good will emerge victorious, and the Jewish people who suffered will see justice done. Even those who may not have been observant will be credited for their sacrifices. This includes a secular Jew who died on Shabbat because he was Jewish, which is considered dying on Kiddush Hashem. Such individuals have the promise of the resurrection of the dead.

Reb Noson's teaching highlights the importance of connecting our present with the future. When we face suffering and darkness, living only in the present can be overwhelming. This current situation is illogical and irrational. But by connecting our present with the future, by understanding that ultimately things will work out for the good, we can maintain our sanity.

The Jewish trait of "patience" becomes our strength. We always look to the future, understanding that every detail in our

lives has meaning, purpose, and value, and everything is recorded and rewarded. We must patiently wait for the ultimate resolution, for the time when Hashem's plan becomes clear and good prevails.

The coming of Mashiach, the resurrection of the dead, and all the good are on the horizon, and this perspective helps us navigate the present challenges.

A Jew who lacks faith cannot truly connect the present moment with the future. The key is having emunah, faith, that what you do now has repercussions for your future. It's crucial to understand that there's no mitzvah, no commandment, in being sad and depressed. When you face a world in turmoil, feeling down, heavy, and depressed, it won't get you far. This state is contrary to what is stated in Parshat Ki Tavo that the curses and tribulations come because "we did not serve Hashem with joy". Hashem wants your joy; He seeks it.

The challenge we face is to always work towards being happy – always. It doesn't mean you should deny or disregard the mourning and sadness that people may feel. Instead, it's about choosing to maintain a sense of joy. You must work for extra simcha, even when it's difficult, as it's an integral part of living a Jewish life. Our response to the world's challenges should not be panic, worry, or despair, but rather maintaining our simcha and trusting that everything will ultimately be good.

This attitude is crucial for bringing Mashiach. It's a prerequisite. The message is that you have to work on being besimcha, and the world depends on you.

The Yetzer Hara thrives when we are sad. It wins when you give in to sadness. If you can demonstrate genuine simcha in the face of adversity, it's a form of resistance. The situation is testing us, trying to break our happiness and make us feel miserable, but that's not what's needed. What's needed is to

draw down positive energy.

Hashem's timing, choosing Simchat Torah for these events, is a test to see if we can maintain our happiness and positivity. It's an opportunity to bring salvation, and the solution lies in an outpouring of true simcha.

Even amidst tragedy, it's essential to work on being positive. Engage in activities that make you happy, whether it's learning Torah, saying Psalms, taking a walk, or simply telling jokes. This is especially important during challenging times when it's easy to get sucked into negativity. Despite the tragedy, the response must be a "super bulldozer dosage of Simcha." This reverse psychology is what's required. Hashem is not trying to make us sad, but to inspire us to become more positive. The situation is a test, and the solution is to draw down positive energy.

The story of the 3,000 teenagers seeking joy emphasizes the need for true Simcha. The tragedy, the captives, the murdered, and the tortured, as mentioned in Parshat Ki Tavo, all serve as a wake-up call to serve Hashem with joy. The essence of Simcha is not to be found in fleeting pleasures such as alcohol, dancing, or indulgence, but rather in the deep, long-lasting joy that emerges as a by-product of performing mitzvot and serving Hashem with a full heart.

Rabbi Nachman's "fabulous five" pieces of advice on achieving happiness:

1. Telling Jokes: Making people smile and laugh.
2. Music and Dancing.
3. Recognizing and focusing on your good points.
4. Hoda'ah (Gratitude): As you get older, you'll appreciate the miracles of life more and more.
5. Looking at the Future: Connecting your current actions with the eternal future, understanding that every

Mitzvah is an eternal investment.

It's vital to emphasize that Hashem loves us. Even in the face of tragedy, ultimately, it will be for the good. We might not understand it fully in the present moment, but Hashem's ways are beyond our comprehension.

When we are hit by something unexpected or tragic, like recent events, it's often a test to see how we react. Falling into sadness, depression, and negativity is not the desired response. Instead, we must work to get back up, maintain a positive outlook, and recognize that this is part of a bigger plan. There's no mitzvah in the Torah to be sad, and Hashem despises sadness and depression.

In summary, the current circumstances necessitate our cultivation of Simcha, which in turn strengthens our Emunah. We must maintain our positive energy, avoid excessive exposure to negative news, and focus on the good. It is through Simcha and Emunah that we can draw blessings into the world and bring about positive change.



Simcha, in Breslev teachings, stands for four devotions that boost your happiness, and these are associated with the four letters in the word "Simcha."

1. Shin (Sin): Learning Halacha (הלכה) daily, even if it's just a few halachic points, can have a healing effect. It offers clarity and removes frustration in life. Learning and understanding Torah law can have a positive impact on your emotional state.
2. Mem: Going to the mikveh (מיקוה) regularly. Mikveh is a Jewish ritual bath, and even for men, going daily or as often as possible can help you feel reborn and

refreshed. It's a way to start anew and can change your perspective.

3. Chet: Waking up at midnight (חַי'ת). It can be challenging but worthwhile. The nighttime hours are considered highly spiritual, and dedicating that time for Torah study, connecting with Hashem, and mourning over the Temple can bring great spiritual elevation.
4. Hey: Practicing Hitbodedut (הִתְבּוּדוּת), which involves setting aside daily time to speak to Hashem in personal prayer and reflection. This dialogue with Hashem helps maintain clarity and brings a sense of connection, which is essential for a healthy mental and spiritual state.

These devotions and practices can help you maintain Simcha and clarity in your life, even in challenging times. They enable you to overcome confusion and frustration, feel connected, and have a sense of purpose and direction.

Maintaining Simcha is crucial, even in the face of difficult circumstances, as the real battle is to avoid falling into sadness and depression. External factors such as the media can contribute to these negative emotions, but individuals should strive to counteract them by spreading positivity and holding onto their joy.

Remember, you are facing a major test that goes beyond the challenges of war and bloodshed; it's the battle against sadness and depression. It's crucial not to fall into the trap of feeling sad and depressed. A person who is alive but sad and depressed is worse off than a dead person who was happy. The ultimate goal is to remain strong, resist succumbing to external pressures, and maintain your Simcha.

Stay strong, and don't let the pressures of current events bring you down. In time, you'll learn to maintain Simcha, despite the challenges you face.

Meir Elkabas

The Four Species and the Four Types of Prayer

written by Meir Elkabas
April 15, 2024



Reb Noson provides us with a thought-provoking perspective. He explains that the lulav, myrtle branches, aravot, and etrog resemble a quill and three fingers gripping a pen. When we

typically hold a pen, it's with the first three fingers. Based on the Tikkuney Zohar, this imagery likens the four species to a quill and three fingers.

The purpose behind holding these four species during Sukkot is to spread the teachings of the tzaddikim (righteous individuals) throughout the world. When we wave these species in all six directions—up, down, and the four cardinal points—we symbolize our intention to disseminate the holy wisdom of Torah. We are, in essence, like writers using a pen with three fingers to engrave and convey these sacred teachings to the world.

This act of spreading knowledge aims to elevate us in prayer, as Rebbe Nachman emphasized. He teaches that a Jew should aspire to the highest level of prayer, where Torah lessons are transformed into heartfelt supplications. This unique form of prayer brings exceptional delight to Hashem, unlike anything else in the world. It's the pinnacle of devotion because it harnesses the energy of Torah to express our deepest thoughts and desires, resulting in a level of prayer that far surpasses any level of Torah study.

Through sharing the teachings of the tzaddikim and holding the four species, we undergo a personal transformation. It enables us to open ourselves up to a profound connection with Hashem. This is one of the ways the four species symbolize our spiritual journey.

Another perspective is that the four species in our hands represent the four accessible formats of prayer for every Jew. First, we have the formal prayers found in the Seder: Shacharit, Mincha, and Arvit—morning, afternoon, and evening prayers, respectively. Then, we can engage in personal prayer using the Book of Psalms. Additionally, various tzaddikim have composed written prayers that touch the heart deeply, such as Reb Noson's prayers based on Rebbe Nachman's teachings in Likutey Moharan.

The highest and most ideal form of prayer is known as Hitbodidut—your personal, spontaneous communication with Hashem. The Rambam explains that this was the original way of prayer, before the establishment of the formal Amida prayer. Speaking to Hashem in your own words, from the depths of your heart, remains the pinnacle of prayer. It's an act of creation, innovation, and the most genuine form of davening.

Incorporating these insights into the significance of the four species enriches our understanding of Sukkot and our spiritual connection with Hashem.

The four species represent the four accessible formats of prayer for every Jew

Now, let's delve into the four types of prayers symbolized by the four species used during Sukkot.

First, there are the myrtle branches, and it's essential that they come in triples. This is reminiscent of the three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov, who each established a specific prayer time. Avraham prayed in the morning, setting the precedent for our morning prayers. Yitzhak prayed during the afternoon, giving rise to our afternoon prayers. And Yaakov prayed at night, establishing our evening prayers. The myrtle's lack of taste mirrors the challenge many face when it comes to davening formally without feeling a deep connection; it's like a prayer without taste.

Next is the willow branch, the Aravah, which thrives near water. This corresponds to the Book of Psalms, which contains the seven voices of King David, calling out over the water. Sukkot, being a time of judgment, particularly for water, explains why on Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh day of the festival, we intensify our prayers for abundant rain. Water is crucial for crops, and thus, life itself. Psalms are closely linked to the willow branch, as we even recite the entire book on Hoshana Rabbah, further emphasizing this connection.

Written prayers, much like the lulav resembling a dagger, can feel like a powerful tool for communicating with Hashem. This is especially true with Reb Noson's prayers, as they guide and assist in expressing one's thoughts and emotions. However, the ultimate goal is to reach the level of the etrog, which is shaped like a heart. Prayers from the heart are the most potent. While you can send forth prayers forcefully like a dagger, the true aim is to soften your heart, pouring out your sincerest emotions before Hashem. This deep, personal form of prayer is akin to Hitbodidut.

In summary, we use the four species during Sukkot to activate these four categories of prayer, preparing ourselves for Simchat Torah. This preparation ensures that we approach Torah study and prayer throughout the year with dedication, allowing us to absorb the Torah's teachings and turn them into meaningful actions in our lives.

Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom!

Meir Elkabas

A Breslov Sukkot: The Four Species Part 2

written by Meir Elkabas
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Meir Elkabas explains the goal of taking the four species and how waving the four species (etrog/citron, lulav/palm, hadassah/myrtle, aravah/willow) spreads the teachings of the tzaddikim throughout the world. Also, the four species represent the four types of prayer accessible to every Jew. Like this video? SUBSCRIBE to our channel.

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