

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

ADDITION BY SUBTRACTION

By Ozer Bergman

"Hagar bore Avram a son...Yishmael" (Genesis 16:15). "Avraham named his son...that Sarah bore him, Yitzchak" (ibid. 21:2).

Certain things in Judaism are a given. You have to "keep and do" the mitzvahs, saying "No!" to yourself when confronted by the temptation of a "do not" mitzvah ("Thou shalt not fib"), and "Of course I want to!" when challenged to perform a "do" mitzvah ("Visit those poor sick folk in the hospital"). On the other hand, it's also a given that you won't succeed every time. Fear of a "superior" (the boss, Mom and Dad, etc.) may get the better of you and that lie will escape your lips. Fear of your own mortality or of saying the wrong thing may keep you from bringing a smile or some comfort to those suffering in the cancer ward or the burn unit.

There are, however, many areas/aspects of Judaism which are not a given. One of these is the level of *kedushah* (holiness, sanctity) that you will achieve. In the business world, it may be true that a person rises to his level of incompetence. But when it comes to being Jewish, your level of *kedushah*-competence depends on your desire for *kedushah*. The proof of the desire is in the effort that you expend.

Many times, the first test of one's desire for *kedushah* comes as soon as he moves to a higher level of holiness. Here I must momentarily digress. You can't measure *kedushah*. It's invisible, odorless, weightless, intangible. We sometimes recognize it in others, usually in tzaddikim. And you can recognize it in yourself. When "all of a sudden" you become aware that certain anti-Torah interests you once had are less interesting to you, there's been some progress. Immeasurable, but progress.

So, Rebbe Nachman teaches, the first test of one's newfound *kedushah* may be to suffer a nocturnal emission. Often, one's immediate reaction to this is confusion, accompanied by a complaint: "If I desire and work towards *kedushah*, why did God make this happen to me?" One's upsetness will hinder his progress, at best, or send him back to a lower level of Jewishness-functioning, God forbid. This confusion is illogical nonsense, says the Rebbe.

Rebbe Nachman asks us to investigate the pathology of this nocturnal emission. Were you thinking about things you shouldn't have? Well, then, who caused the nocturnal emission you had? You! So don't complain. But let's not jump to conclusions. Maybe you weren't thinking badly. In that case, the nocturnal emission isn't a bad sign at all. If by definition a nocturnal emission was a bad thing, our Sages could never have deemed it a good sign, as they did for one who is ill (*Berachot* 57b). So again, there's no reason to complain.

In fact, the Rebbe tells us, the nocturnal emission is a result of one's progress. How's that? The Talmud teaches that the more one lives a tzaddik-life, the more strictly one is judged (*Ta'anit* 8a). The result of one's desire to be a better Jew is a more thorough examination of his past: "This guy wants to be a holier Jew? Let's see if he deserves it." This is why obstacles, like "nocturnal emission confusion," come one's way. Listen, says Rebbe Nachman, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) made such a fantastic leap of *kedushah* on Yom Kippur, and the resultant examination of his behavior was so exacting, that his not having a nocturnal emission was reckoned a miracle (*Avot* 5:7). Are you going to complain that a miracle wasn't made for you?

Besides which, the pursuit of *kedushah* requires one to be divested of whatever prevents him from being able to receive the *kedushah*. Since you can't fix a problem unless you know you have it, a nocturnal emission is a favor: it lets a person know that he is contaminated by a buried impurity. This, Rebbe Nachman says, is why Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) did not father Yitzchak Avinu until he had first fathered Yishmael.

Now, if even Avraham Avinu, the maestro and personification of kindness, had deep, buried flaws that needed to be purged before he could "create his masterpiece," his life's work, the next pillar on which the world rests—his child—certainly we have to be humble enough to acknowledge our imperfections, and even more humble to allow that we may have even more that needs to be removed before we can reach our goals of *kedushah*.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

(Based on *Likutey Moharan* II, 117)

SIDEPATH

The Rebbe once spoke to one of us about his attainments. He seemed to boast of his high level and deep perception just like one taunts another and tries to make him jealous of some mundane achievement.

The other man replied to the Rebbe, "How can I achieve this? Who is worthy of attaining such a high level? Surely only one with a lofty soul like yours!"

The Rebbe seemed very irritated and answered, "This is the trouble. You think that tzaddikim attain greatness merely because they have a very great soul. This is absolutely wrong! Any person can attain my levels and become just like me. All it takes is true devotion and effort" (RNW #165).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

18:1 God appeared to him at the Trees of Mamre

God Appears To Us When We Need Him

When Abraham was sick and weak (after his *milah*), specifically then did he merit a revelation of God. The same applies to anyone who is sick and weak: he merits the Divine Presence resting upon him (*Nedarim* 40a). Similarly, on Chanukah and Purim, festivals that fall on week (weak) days, one merits God's Presence (LH I, p. 24).

18:19 For I have known him, that he will command his children and his household after him. They will observe the path of God, doing righteousness and justice

Stories Of Tzaddikim Inspire Us To Serve God

Rebbe Nachman testified that he was greatly motivated to serve God because of the stories about tzaddikim that he heard in his parent's home (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #138). This is the principal legacy that Abraham gave to us, his descendants, so that we should be able to "observe the path of God, doing righteousness and justice."

18:22 Abraham was still standing before God...Abraham drew near

Abraham Established The Morning Prayer

He drew near to pray (Rashi).

The Four Sons mentioned in the Pesach Haggadah allude to Isaac (the wise son), Esau (the wicked son), Jacob (the simple son), and Ishmael (the son who does not know how to ask). They are the children of Abraham.

Our Sages teach that Abraham established *Shacharit* (the Morning Prayer) (*Berakhot* 26b), which can perfect and rectify every type of person. The word *ShaCharIT* (שחרית) is an acronym for *She'eino Yodei'a* (שאינו יודע, one who does not know), *Chakham* (חכם, the wise son), *Rasha* (רשע, the wicked son) and *Tam* (תם, the simple son) (LM I, 30:6).

18:27 I am dust and ashes

The Path To Proper Prayer

To pray properly, one needs the qualities of both "dust" and "ashes." "Dust" refers to humility and to connecting oneself to tzaddikim who have died and are resting in the dust. "Ashes" corresponds to overcoming one's evil traits (LM I, 55:5).

21:6 Sarah said, "God has made me rejoice. Whoever hears will laugh for me"

The Joy Of Isaac's Birth

YitZChaK (יצחק, Isaac) is like *tZChoK* (צחק, laughter and joy). What is this joy? That from a seemingly mundane act, a union between a man and a woman, a holy tzaddik can be born. Why do we rejoice at a wedding? Because from this couple can come forth great tzaddikim who will rectify the world (LH III, p. 52).

22:2 Offer him there as a sacrifice on one of the mountains that I will tell you

We Must Search For God

God did not tell Abraham immediately which mountain he should ascend. This is God's way: He momentarily withholds information from tzaddikim and afterwards reveals it to them. This increases their reward (Rashi).

God works the same way with us. He hides Himself to encourage us to seek and search for Him. Then, after we find God through our

own efforts, we discover what He really wants from us (LH VII, p. 110).

22:4 He saw the place from a distance

We Must Await Salvation

Abraham saw the place of the Temple, where his descendants would serve God (*Yalkut Reuveini*).

But what he saw was at a distance, for at that moment he was going to that very place to slaughter Isaac. Slaughtering Isaac meant that he would not have any descendants. Yet in his prophetic vision, Abraham saw his descendants serving in the Temple.

After God told him not to slaughter Isaac, Abraham set about finding a wife for his son. This marriage, too, was distant, for Isaac was thirty-seven years old and Rebecca had just been born. And despite God's promise that the Land would be given to him and his descendants, Abraham had to pay a fortune for a burial place for Sarah. Then Rebecca was barren, and there were many trials and tribulations yet to come with Esau and Jacob. Still, Abraham saw and knew that the salvation would come; it is just at a distance. Abraham teaches us never to give up hope, for the salvation, though in the distance, will come. In fact, if we look, we will see it coming. But we must have the patience to wait (LH V, p. 136a-272).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

6 — "Summon Joshua" (Deuteronomy 31:14)
(continued)

6. Even if a person knows that he has repented completely, nevertheless, he needs to repent for his previous repentance. For originally, when he repented, he did so according to his then conception [of God]. Subsequently, after he has repented, he has undoubtedly attained a more perfect recognition and conception of God. According to the conception which he has now, his previous understanding was certainly crude by comparison. Thus, he must now repent for making crass God's exaltedness. Fortunate is he who merits this kind of repentance!

7. The true tzaddik engages in repentance all his life. For even when he knows that he has repented completely, he still repents for his previous conception of God, which he now

considers crude compared with his present conception of God's exaltedness. Thus, he continues all his life, going from one level of understanding to the next and repenting for his previous level of understanding. This is the idea of the World to Come, which will be "entirely Shabbat," entirely repentance. For the essence of the World to Come is the conception of Godliness [that is experienced there]; and each time that a person attains an additional level of understanding, he [then] repents for his previous level of understanding. Anyone who has a brain in his head can understand from this the greatness of the Creator and the greatness of the tzaddikim. Happy are they and happy are those who follow them!

8. A person who wishes to return to God must be extremely knowledgeable in Jewish law, so that nothing in the world will throw him or distance him [from his quest], regardless of whether he is spiritually "rising" or "falling." No matter what happens to him, he will fortify himself and "hold on." This way, he will fulfill the verse, "If I ascend to Heaven, You are there; if I go down to Hell, here You are" (Psalms 139:8). For even in the deepest hell, a person can draw himself close to God—since there too, God is present, as in, "If I go down to Hell, here You are."



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