

UNITED HEBREW(S)

By Ozer Bergman

"Israel camped there, opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2).

As one person, with one heart (Rashi).

A few weeks ago, I was asked to write something about Rebbe Nachman's teachings concerning *shalom* and Jewish unity. As you may recall, there was some sort of turmoil concerning internecine feuding in a city here in the Holy Land. There had been a bit of genuine unpleasantness between fellow Jews that was worsened and blown out of proportion through the unholy alliance of media and politicians (and the politically-motivated). But our Sages teach us to not try to calm someone when he is angry (*Avot* 4:23). When tempers flare, reason is absent. So here we are, now, when our ears and hearts are more receptive. God willing, these words will help.

At the end of his story "The Spider and The Fly" (*Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, p. 151), Rebbe Nachman tells us that when the soul of a great tzaddik—him!—comes to this world, Satan protests. "If the tzaddik is allowed to come to the world, I will be unable to do my job! Do not let him be born!" God's reply is that the tzaddik must be born. Satan must seek a solution to his problem.

The tzaddik must come in order to teach and model for us how life is meant to be lived. If not, we could not know and we would have no chance to choose a proper way of life. On the other hand, as Satan correctly pointed out, the tzaddik would be so successful that he, Satan, could not do his job. There must be free will. That's the point of living: having and using free will, preferably making right choices! So what is Satan's solution? He befriends a stooped-over old man: *machloket*—argument, strife, dissension, politics. And the Satan laughs; he is no longer afraid of the great tzaddik and his teachings.

Let's think for a moment. Satan goes from pleading and being distraught at the prospect of squaring off against the tzaddik, to laughing and being unconcerned. Why? He has found *machloket*. The implication is that the tzaddik needs and thrives on *shalom*. *Shalom* means more than "peace." Just as *machloket* is related to the Hebrew word for

"piece" and "fragment," *shalom* is related to the words "whole" and "complete." Everything in Rebbe Nachman's teachings stresses—and sometimes screams—wholeness: in prayer, in Torah study, in caring and sharing (*chesed* and *tzedakah*).*

Too often it is thought that Torah study is meant only for "religious" Jews, those already consciously committed to observing the *mitzvot*. Not so. Rebbe Nachman wanted every Jew, regardless of commitment or level of scholarship, to have a serious, consistent, regular, daily schedule of Torah study. Why? Because consistent Torah study is so powerful it can break all the bonds by which the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) keeps a person away from holiness. Which person? Even the most wicked, and certainly you (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #19).

How can a person develop an interest and a love for Torah that will drive him to establish and maintain such a schedule? By being careful to not speak ill of any Jew (*ibid.*, #91). The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was a wedding. The Jews were the groom, the Torah was the bride. When the bride is beautiful, the love is complete (*Song of Songs* 4:17), but if the bride has any fault, the love cannot be whole. Every Jew is a letter in the Torah. If, God forbid, there is a fault with a Jew/letter, the bride loses some of her luster. One's love for Torah study will weaken.**

Our Sages teach: "*Derekh erez* precedes Torah" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3). *Derekh erez* means many things, including how one interacts with other human beings. The Kotzker Rav taught that one's *derekh erez* precedes his Torah the way a preface precedes a book. From the preface, you know the book's content; from a person's *derekh erez*, you know the content of his Torah.

* There is much more to be said on this topic. For now, this must suffice.

** What should one study? Study whatever you like, but Rebbe Nachman said to make sure to study *halakhah* (Jewish law) every day.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Sichot HaRan* (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*) #19, 91

SIDEPATH

Be joyous, always. And serve God with joy. Even if there are times when things look dark and difficult, strengthen yourself with the "good times" gone by. This can be compared to a blind man who once had the power of sight. Although now he can't see at all, he knows there's light—he's witnessed it. Therefore, strengthen yourself with joy—the joy you once knew. If you do, then eventually the "good days" will return (LM I, 222).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

18:1 Jethro heard

Hearing And Heeding

Everyone heard, but only Jethro heeded the message (LM I, 134).

Only Jethro allowed the message to enter his heart. From this, we may infer that a teacher should transmit Torah only in a way that enters his student's heart (*ibid.*, II, 47).

18:9 Jethro rejoiced

We Should Look To The Source Of Joy

In general, people experience the joy of an event in a fragmented fashion. For example, at a wedding, some people are happy for the couple, some because of the festivities, others due to the food, and still others as a result of the music. But the main reason for joy is that at their source, all the fragmentary manifestations are one. *Vayichad Yitro* (Jethro rejoiced) may also be translated as "Jethro made a unity." That is, Jethro made a unity of all the joy that he had experienced. He saw beyond its material manifestations and recognized that it all came from God, the Source of joy (see LM II, 34).

18:21 Officers of thousands, officers of hundreds, officers of fifties and officers of tens

We Must Use Our Authority Wisely

Every person has a level of authority. At the very least, an individual has authority over himself. He must strive to control his evil inclination.

As for the person who wields power over others, he must use that authority not for his own benefit but solely for the sake of God (LM I, 56:1).

19:6 You will be a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation

God Acts Humbly So We Can Relate To Him

This verse indicates God's humility. God lowered Himself, as it were, by offering the Jews promises of greatness and diminishing the intensity of His Presence so that we might be able to relate to Him (LM I, 219).

19:16 Thunder and lightning

Unworthy Teachers Take Advantage Of True Torah Teachings

When God gave the Torah at Sinai, the effects were felt all over the world. Non-Jews came to Balaam to ask him what was happening, and Balaam responded by offering a Torah teaching of his own (*Zevachim* 116a).

A similar process occurs today. Parallel to the Giving of the Torah, great tzaddikim reveal awesome Torah teachings. But when they do, unworthy people (corresponding to Balaam) provide their own interpretations and ideas. The ability of the latter people to reveal Torah is not inherent within them, but stems from the tzaddik's teachings (LM II, 57).

20:1 God spoke all these words, saying

Allusions In The Ten Commandments

"**I am God your Lord**"—the essence of *da'at* (knowledge of God) is to know that God is Lord.

"**Do not have any other gods before Me**" refers to the foolishness that diverts a person from serving God. Elsewhere, Scripture states: "If you sway, you will serve idolatry" (Deuteronomy 11:16), on which the Baal Shem Tov comments: "If you sway from your devotion to God, it is as if you served idolatry."

"**Do not take the Name of God your Lord in vain**" refers to fearing God, for fear of God leads to knowledge of God (as explained in LM II, 7:4).

"**Remember the Shabbat day**" corresponds to self-nullification before God, the Creator and Master of all.

"**Honor your father and mother**" refers to revealing God in this world, for parents draw down souls to this earth so that these souls can come to recognize God.

The next five commandments contravene the first five commandments. Thus:

"**Do not murder**" implies concealing knowledge of God, for the person who is murdered can no longer draw knowledge of God into the world.

"**Do not commit adultery**" is an example of the foolishness that diverts a person from serving God.

"**Do not steal**" refers to shunning the fear of God, since a person who steals essentially believes "God is not watching."

"**Do not bear false witness**" contravenes Shabbat and self-nullification before God, as one who lies gives testimony that he does not take God into consideration at all.

"**Do not desire**" contradicts honoring one's parents and revealing God in this world, because one who is not satisfied with his lot but desires what belongs to others denies that God provides him with his needs. Being happy with one's lot displays true honor of God (LH III, p. 328ff).

20:18 The people stood at a distance while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was

God Can Always Be Found

The difference between Moses and the Jews was that when the people saw "thick clouds" and obstacles, they remained at a distance. But Moses never wavered. Even when things looked difficult, even when his objectives seemed distant and clouded, he always knew that he would find God—because God is *always* present, even in the "thick clouds" and confusions that a person faces. That is how Moses attained his exalted level (LM I, 115).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

9 — "**The deeps covered them**"
(Exodus 15:5) (*continued*)

5. There are people who merit to say the words of their prayers with such honesty that their words give off light like a gemstone, which radiates its own light. There are others, however, whose speech is only like a window, which has no light of its own but merely allows light to pass through it; [this type of person] can be illuminated only by someone else. Know that it is all in accordance with the level of truth.

6. When a person truly awakens himself to God, he thereby merits to break open the screens and obstacles that separate him from holiness, and to find the openings to go out from darkness to light. By this, he also merits to awaken other people with him, to stir other people to repent, taking them out of the darkness and bringing them back to God.

7. Each person needs to send up his prayers through the gate of his own tribe [of the twelve tribes of Israel]; however, it requires great merit to be able to do this. Therefore, every person must connect his prayers to the tzaddik of the generation, because the tzaddik knows how to match the gates [to the prayers] and to send up each and every prayer to the appropriate gate. [These twelve gates are signified by the twelve windows that are customarily built in a synagogue, which allude to the twelve tribes.]



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