

BLACK LIGHT

By Ozer Bergman

When and where Rebbe Nachman told this parable is not recorded. But he told it and since Chanukah is not too far away, we share it now:

A ma'aseh (story, parable).

A son left his father. He was in many lands for a long time, staying with strangers. After a while he returned to his father. The son was proud that he had learned there an important craft: how to make heng-leichter, hanging candelabras or menorahs. He insisted that his father invite all those engaged in menorah-making in order to display his expertise in the craft. The father complied. He invited all the menorah artisans to see his son's success, what he had achieved during his time away with strangers.

The son displayed a menorah that he had made. Everyone thought it was very ugly. The father mingled among the craftsmen, asking them for their honest appraisal. They had no choice but to tell him the truth: it was quite ugly.

The son bragged to his father, "Did you see the genius of my craft?" The father broke the news to him: nobody thought it was nice. "On the contrary!" answered the son. "That's exactly how I demonstrated my expertise. I showed everyone his flaw. This menorah has the flaws of each of the local craftsmen. You can see it for yourself.

"This one thought that one piece was ugly, but that another piece was stunning. For the second craftsman, it was just the opposite. What the first one thought was ugly, he thought was beautiful, exquisite—but a different part was atrocious. This was true for all of them: what one thought was repulsive, the other considered attractive, and vice versa.

"I made this menorah solely from flaws in order to show all of them that they aren't perfect, that no one is perfect. Because what one thinks is beautiful,

someone else considers a flaw. But in fact, I can make [a menorah] the way it ought to be."

Rebbe Nachman then commented, "If people would know the flaws and deficiencies of an object, they would know its essence, even if they had never actually seen the object."

One of the first things a person learns when he discovers Rebbe Nachman is the Rebbe's penchant for accentuating the positive. In particular, the lesson *Azamra* (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282) teaches us to find the good points—at least one—in ourselves and in others. So this *ma'aseh* (untitled in the original, but often called "The Chandelier" or "The Menorah") seems out of character. There are many details in this *ma'aseh*, but let's focus on what the son was trying to accomplish.*

What was the son trying to do? Was he trying to show off? Make his father proud? Put the local (read: provincial) artisans to shame? All of the above? He tells his father he wants the menorah-makers to realize that they have shortcomings. Yet he never tells *them*. He tells *us*. So it is we, the readers, that Rebbe Nachman is inviting to view the menorah. This is the first good point the Rebbe is finding within us, namely that we—like he—are menorah-makers, meant to shine a unique light into the world.

The invitation to view the son's craftsmanship is reminiscent of the competitions in Rebbe Nachman's story "The Seven Beggars." Just as in that story, in which the crippled, seemingly powerless beggars are really the most skilled and accomplished, here the maker of the universally ugly menorah is able to make the perfect menorah. By its maker's own admission, the menorah is intentionally made solely of flaws and deficiencies. That is, it was no mistake to make it from mistakes (a type of perfection in a funny kind of way). Yet, ugly as he thought the menorah was, each craftsman also found something to like about it.

SIDEPATH

Reb Noson wrote:

A person's main test and the essence of his free will stems from the fact that he does not really comprehend his own situation... For if he were aware of his true position at every moment—if he were to appreciate how very precious to God is his every single good movement and thought—then he would certainly be chasing after God with all his might and he would be a tzaddik! (*Healing Leaves*, p. 31).

So if they thought that parts of the menorah were beautiful, why did the craftsmen say it was ugly? We do it all the time. It's called "human nature." Our own imperfect menorahs are pretty good, despite the deficiencies. However, a flaw in someone else's menorah makes the whole thing ugly—even though it's the same flaw as ours! But, says the tzaddik, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. We have to learn to see our own ugly, not someone else's. The fact that the Rebbe pointed out to us this fault means we can rid ourselves of it. That's another positive in our favor.

Finally, remember that even if the menorah you make is totally and absolutely ugly, the light it gives is nonetheless radiant.

* This is only one possible interpretation of this parable.

*A gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

Based on *Sipurei Ma'asiot*
(*Rabbi Nachman's Stories*),
"Additional Stories"

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BATTLE PLAN

By Yossi Katz

Ever since Jacob had “stolen” the right of the firstborn and its inherent blessings, Esau waited ever so patiently for their father Isaac to pass away so that he could avenge Jacob’s act. That moment had finally arrived and Esau planned to kill his brother Jacob. “Jacob became very frightened and it distressed him. So he divided the people with him... He said, ‘If Esau comes to the one camp and strikes it down, then the remaining camp will survive’” (Genesis 32:8-9).

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 76:3) interprets Jacob’s strategy as applying to the future as well. It specifically refers to a time when the Romans had conquered the Land of Israel and most of the Jews were living in Babylonia. Those remaining Jews in Israel were under a constant threat of persecution; the Jews of Babylon would fast on Mondays and Thursdays for their well-being. The Midrash understands that although there will be many times that Jews are persecuted, there will always be a group that survives.

Reb Noson interprets Jacob’s strategy in another way, as a battle plan against the personal spiritual “holocaust” that each of us face on a daily basis.

The evil inclination is once again overpowering us and it seems as if we just don’t have the strength to hold our ground. We try different tactics and make new resolutions, but alas, it seems that nothing is working and the battle is being lost.

When the going got tough, though, Jacob did not turn back. He divided his assets into two camps and soldiered on.

Even if our overall plan seems to be failing—we can’t seem to study more, to pray better, to correct our misdeeds—we can use all our remaining strength to salvage the little bit that we can hold on to. Even if we didn’t end up having proper concentration in prayer, we can beseech

God afterwards for help in a few meaningful words. If that doesn’t work, we can try to study a little (or a lot) of Torah. And if that tactic fails as well, the main thing is to remain steadfast in our desire to become close with God. At any moment, a Jew can scream out to God and ask Him to please save him and help him. Should things digress to the point where you just don’t know what to do

**We may lose
the battle,
but win the war**

anymore, forget about whether you made the right choice or not and concentrate on doing even the small things that will bring you closer to God right now, wherever you may be.

Rashi explains that the remaining camp will survive against Esau because Jacob will do battle against him and Esau will be forced to let them go. By following the advice of the tzaddik and doing battle against our own evil inclination, by utilizing whatever little good we can, we will insure that at least those actions and desires will survive and that we will once again emerge victorious.

Based on *Likutey Halakhot*,
Hilkhot Rosh Chodesh 7

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KITZUR L”M WEEKLY

**17 — “It happened as they emptied
their sacks”** (Genesis 42:35)
(continued)

Addendum to Lesson #17:

The way the sense of hearing functions is that the letters of a person’s speech are carved into the air [as he speaks]. This air then strikes other air, and that air strikes yet other air, until the letters reach the ear of the listener. Therefore, when the air is calm, tranquil and clear, speech can be heard at a distance. But when a storm wind is blowing, it is impossible to hear even the sound of another person’s voice, let alone his actual words.

Likewise, when love reigns between people—which is the concept of “calm and tranquil air”—and when there is harmony between them, then their words are heard at a distance. This holds true on both the individual and the collective level. On the individual level, the good words of each person are heard by his friend. Similarly, in the world at large, the holy, true words of the true tzaddik can be heard and accepted even at very great distances, as alluded to in the verse, “His fame went out into all the provinces” (Esther 9:4)—to the point that even those who are very far away come and draw close to God as converts and returnees to the faith. But when enmity exists among people, God forbid, this hatred is similar to a “raging storm wind,” an evil wind that creates division among them. As a result, the air becomes turbulent until speech cannot be heard even in [the speaker’s] place or near him, not to mention at a distance. The primary rectification for creating the “calm and tranquil air” lies in [giving] charity to true tzaddikim and to righteous poor people.

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