

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT NASO • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 34

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Just Like the Sotah

By Yossi Katz

HAVING JUST CELEBRATED Shavuot, I realized that is an interesting holiday. On the one hand, we celebrate receiving the Torah from God's very mouth. This would seem to indicate that our relationship with God was absolutely faithful and strong. Yet, just a short time later, the Jewish People violated one of the Torah's most important precepts by making the Golden Calf.

We did not shy away from celebrating Shavuot even though the joy of the main event was marred. Human actions are expected to be far from perfect and many of the Torah's most valuable lessons are learned from our deficiencies. Our main challenge is to grow from these lessons and not be buried by them.

In a similar vein, this week's *parashah* discusses the Sotah. If a husband becomes suspicious of his wife and warns her not to seclude herself with a certain man, and she nevertheless chooses to do so, she is brought before the Kohen to be "investigated." This priestly investigation involves bringing a barley meal-offering, and she is required to drink from the "bitter waters." Through the drinking of the waters, her guilt or innocence is proven (see Numbers 5:11-31).

Even if she is found innocent of her husband's major accusation, she is still considered at fault for secluding herself with the other man. The description of the Sotah begins, "Any man whose wife goes astray" (*ibid.*, 5:12). The word *tiSTeH* (goes astray) has the same letters as *ShoTaH* (idiot). Rashi explains that one does not sin unless a spirit of folly first enters into him or her. The Torah thus implies that a spirit of folly entered the Sotah, and she went ahead and sinned by secluding herself with another man.

Since the Sotah did something born of complete folly, she must bring an offering consisting of animal food. Just as animals act only according to their impulses, without any higher reasoning, so did the Sotah.

The *Zohar* (*Raya Mehemna, Emor*) further explains that just as the Sotah is tested through barley, so too, the Jewish people are tested through the barley of the Omer-offering.

By bringing the Omer-offering in the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, we identify with the Sotah and with the deficiencies in our own relationship with God. We are saying, "We, too, have secluded ourselves with temptation and mindlessness; we, too, have sunken to promiscuous places. However, by waving the Omer-offering in every direction, we demonstrate that God still surrounds us and we reaffirm that our relationship remains faithful and strong."

Interestingly, even though the Sotah is at fault for secluding herself, once she is proven innocent, she is rewarded. Our Rabbis teach that whatever childbearing issue she had beforehand will now be reversed. For example, if she previously bore children with much pain, she will now be blessed with easy pregnancy (see *Sotah* 26a). The great embarrassment she experienced while being investigated serves as an atonement for her wrongdoing, and her wrongful act is transformed for her merit.

We all mess up. Making mistakes is part of human nature and allows for our free will. Only our souls, which are forced to live within the confines of the human body with all of its desires and physical necessities, can give God the ultimate *nachas*. By living honestly and humbly acknowledging our many faults and challenges, our shame and embarrassment can be transformed into a catalyst for blessing and our eventual success. Yes, God understands our human nature. But He waits for us to return to Him however many times we veer away. By humbly accepting our faults and mistakes, we can appreciate our shame in a positive way. The same shame that was created by our "spirit of folly" can now be transformed into a great spirit of *teshuvah* (repentance) and *nachas*. Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaPeirot 5

Drawn to the Rebbe

By Gedaliah Fleer

THE FOLLOWERS OF *Rebbe Nachman* come from all countries and walks of life. Here's how some of the Breslovers of previous generations discovered *Rebbe Nachman*:

R' Yitzchak Mendel Rottenberg (1895-1991)

As a child in Poland, R' Yitzchak Mendel noticed that one of his teachers would cry while reading from a book as the children reviewed their lessons, and afterwards place the volume in a locked drawer. This teacher was a harsh man, and R' Yitzchak Mendel could not understand what could evoke such an emotional response from him. His curiosity got the better of him and he decided to break into the drawer. There he discovered the Breslov book *Likutey Tefilot* (Collected Prayers, by Reb Noson). R' Yitzchak Mendel traveled to Uman for the first time around 1908 and became a close student of R' Avraham Chazan. He immigrated to Israel in 1919 and was one of the founders of the original Breslov synagogue in Meah Shearim. After moving to America in the mid-1920s, he became one of the founders of the Breslov *shtiebel* on New York's Lower East Side. Many chassidim fondly recall the beautiful Rosh HaShanah services he led.

R' Yitzchok Breiter (1886-1943)

R' Yitzchok came across a copy of *Likutey Moharan* for the first time when he was studying in yeshivah. Learning the Rebbe's Torah opened new worlds of thought and faith for him. He hid the book so he could find it easily the following day, but when he returned, the book had disappeared. A few weeks later, he came across a copy of *Parparaot LeChokhmah*, the commentary on *Likutey Moharan* by the Tcheriner Rav, and he used the information it contained to make contact with the Breslover Chassidim living in Uman. R' Yitzchak was instrumental in spreading Rebbe Nachman's teachings in Poland before World War I.

R' Shmuel Horowitz (1913-1989)

According to tradition, a man came to sell Breslov books in R' Shmuel's father's hometown of Tzefat, Israel. When his father told the man to pack his bags and leave the town, the man blessed him that he would have children and grandchildren who would study from those same books. At the age of 17, R' Shmuel started practicing *hitbodedut* after reading *Hishtafkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul). He noticed a dramatic improvement in his ability to pray, and slowly drew closer to Breslov Chassidut.

From "Against All Odds"

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

37. When people's faith in God is weak, all kinds of false doctrines and beliefs gain influence. But when their faith in the truth is strengthened, these ideologies lose their grip and become discredited. Even the nations who were far from God abandon their fallacies and come to believe in the truth. They may not actually convert. But although they remain in their place, they acknowledge God and believe and know that



there is One who was the First (*Likutey Moharan* II, 2:4).

38. Faith is attained through attachment to the Tzaddik who has attained the level of *ruach hakodesh*, the holy spirit. Through this *ruach hakodesh*, man's faculty for symbolic thought is refined and cleansed, bound up as it is with the power of imagination and fantasy. Only then can he attain perfect faith in God and in the constant renewal of the world. This is the foundation of everything. The whole world depends on it (*ibid.* II, 8:7-8).

39. Faith depends on a person's mouth. We must say we believe – say it out loud! As it is written, "I will make known Your faithfulness *with my mouth*" (Psalms 89:1). When a person has a crisis of faith, or even passing doubts, it is very good if he says out loud, "I believe." By expressing your faith in words, you can come to genuine faith (*ibid.* II, 44).



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The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman's chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.