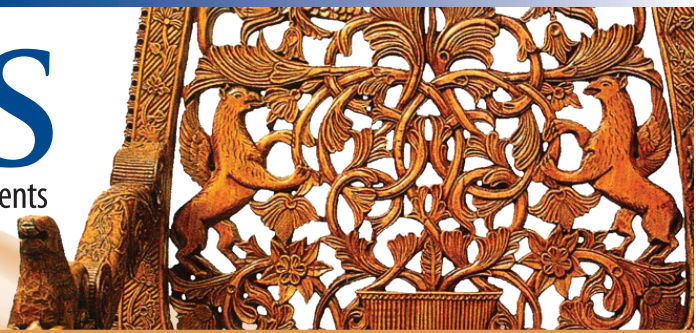


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT TERUMAH • 5779 • VOL. 9 NO. 20

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When in Rome...

By Yossi Katz

WHERE IS GOD? Mankind has pondered this question for an eternity. Interestingly, our Rabbis answered, “He is in the great city of Rome” (Jerusalem Talmud, *Ta’anit* 81). This answer seems very odd. Rome was a city rife with idol worship and immorality. In fact, our Rabbis were alluding to a particular existence of God that is hidden and unfathomable to us humans.

Pirkey Avot tells us that God created the world with Ten Utterances (*Avot* 5:1). But if we count from the beginning of Genesis, we see only nine acts of creation that begin, “And God said...” Rebbe Nachman points us to the very first verse of the Torah: “In the beginning God created Heaven and earth.” Since this first act of creation does not record God as saying anything, it is called the Hidden Utterance. This Hidden Utterance is so holy and elevated that all nine of the other utterances of creation receive their vitality from it (*Likutey Moharan* II, 12).

This Hidden Utterance alludes to the existence of God in Rome. There are some places that seem to be utterly devoid of Godliness. These places are so bleak that there is even room to deny God’s existence outright. Yet doesn’t God also sustain these places? This is a great paradox and something that we cannot properly fathom. Rebbe Nachman explains that precisely because these places run counter to God’s honor, they cannot be sustained through the regular, revealed channels. Instead, God sustains them through the Hidden Utterance, which is concealed in this world.

There is a great lesson in all of this. Wherever a person may fall – whether he doubts the existence of God or faces temptation and sins – that place itself is being sustained by God at the level of the Hidden Utterance.

Even though it may seem as though God isn’t there, if you cry out, “Where are you, God? How can I seek You out and connect to You?” you show that God *does* exist, even when all else seems to say the opposite. *There is* Godliness that is sustaining you and giving you the vitality to fall in the first place. You have now transformed your descent into an ascent, showing that God’s honor is ever-present, even when it is completely obscured.

Had the Jews not sinned and made the Golden Calf, they would have merited to enter the Land of Israel immediately. The Land of Israel is the ultimate place of revealed holiness and Divine perceptions. Instead, the Jews fell into a concealed state of Godliness. But they were given the key to get out: the Mishkan. God commanded them to build it out of “gold, silver and copper” (Exodus 25:3). These were the same materials used in the creation of the golden calf. God gave the Jews the opportunity to take the materials that lead to idol worship and reveal their true source, using them to build a place for the revelation of Godliness.

As they brought the Mishkan along on their journey through the desert, the Jews elevated each of their encampments to a place of awesome holiness, one that assumed the laws of sanctity governing the Holy Temple. However, as soon as they left, their camping ground would revert to its original, unsanctified state.

Life takes all of us to different destinations. Sometimes we find ourselves in Rome. But each of us is a mini Mishkan. We each have the ability, no matter where we travel and no matter how far we fall, to cry out to God. Through this, we can reveal God’s honor and transform even the lowest place into the holiest sanctuary.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Gevivot
Chov MeYesomim 3:7*

Act On It!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WINE IS FAMOUS – or infamous – for breaking down barriers. And it can sometimes help someone see a truth that he might otherwise have missed.

Two drunks were having a heart-to-heart talk. One gushed to his friend, “My dear brother, you know I love you so much!”

“I don’t know that at all!” his drunken companion replied. “If you really love me, why don’t you show it? You know how down and out I am. Why don’t you come to see how much I suffer? How come you don’t do anything to help me in my misery?”

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov heard this exchange and perceived the hidden truth within the wine-soaked speech. “I have always professed to love my fellow Jews with all my heart, yet I, too, have been derelict in this,” he thought. “If I really care for them, why aren’t I doing more for them?”

From that point onward, Rabbi Moshe Leib worked very hard to help his poor brothers. During the frigid Russian winter, he awoke at midnight to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* and then went out to the forest to chop wood. He would chop as much as the poor required. Only then would he return to the city and continue his Divine service.

“I learned from those two drunkards that if your caring doesn’t express itself in action, it is not real,” he said.

Rebbe Nachman made a similar point about *emunah* (faith): “The verse states about Moses that ‘his hands were *emunah*’ (Exodus 17:12). It is not enough to profess to have *emunah* in one’s heart. We need to act on our *emunah*. If it is genuine, our *emunah* will express itself in the world of action.”

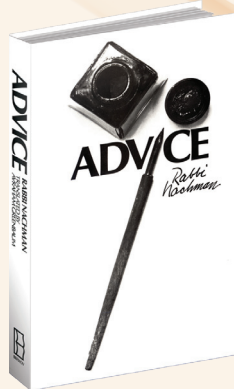
As a wise man explained, “Imagine if a wealthy husband professes to love his wife and says he would do anything for her. She asks him to pick up a piece of jewelry for her. He never gets around to it. Will she really believe that his love is genuine? And if she asks for something simple, like picking up some groceries, and he just makes excuses, she knows for sure that his devotion isn’t real. The same is true in Godly terms. If you won’t act in even the smallest way on your professed convictions, what do they really mean?”

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:565

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

JOURNEYING AND TRAVEL. 6. When a person has a heart, no place presents an insufferable barrier against his service of God. It is no excuse to say that in a certain place, the barriers are so great that it is impossible to serve God. When a person has a heart, all the places in the entire world are his (*Likutey Moharan II*, 56).



7. Whenever you are on a journey, make sure you go to the mikvah. The mikvah has the power to save us from murder (*Tzaddik* #475).

AWE AND DEVOTION. 1. Never fear anything except God. If ever you begin to feel afraid of something, remember the great fear that is due to God. Throughout the day, fill your entire consciousness with this sense of awe. It will help you to pray with all your strength and utter the words with such force that they are like thunderbolts! Then you will hear the words that are on your lips. This is the way to achieve true joy, and to perform the mitzvot with a joy derived from the mitzvot themselves. Then you will attain the understanding of how to nullify all harsh decrees even after the decrees have been made, God forbid (*Likutey Moharan I*, 5:5).

2. In order to achieve these levels, you must combine your fear of Heaven with love. A person’s main strength lies in the love he has for God. Nevertheless, fear must come first (*ibid.*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.