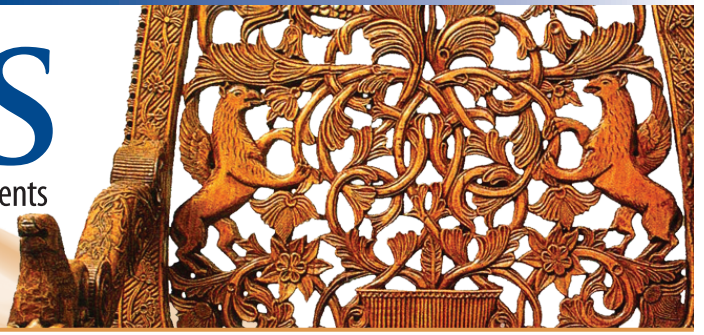


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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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

Sing to God!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MOSHE BRESLOVER provided a glimpse into the depth and beauty of Reb Noson's Divine service. "Once I was traveling to Uman with Reb Noson. Our covered wagon served as a kind of traveling *beit midrash* for prayer and Torah study. Reb Noson would always cover his face with his *tallit* while praying. Although he usually prayed loudly and joyously, on this occasion he seemed preoccupied and intoned the prayers in a still, pained voice filled with longing. Every word was uttered in a brokenhearted way."

Reb Moshe resonated so deeply with Reb Noson's mood that his own heart was filled with bitterness and he began to weep. When Reb Noson reached the verse in the prayers, "Sing to God, His chassidim," he paused for a few minutes. Suddenly he began to hum Rebbe Nachman's tune for *Eishet Chayil* ("A Woman of Valor") with great yearning. Reb Moshe trembled all over. After Reb Noson sang this tune for twenty minutes, he slowly began to clap his hands with force and belted out a livelier tune to "Sing to God, His chassidim!"

His prayers were so loud and joyous that the people in the town they passed through were astounded. Entranced by the deep attachment to God that they could hear in Reb Noson's voice, they chased after the wagon. Clearly, they wanted to hear him sing as long as possible.

After Reb Noson finished his prayers, he said to Reb Moshe, "You know, I felt very brokenhearted when I began to pray. I recalled how every time I would visit Rebbe Nachman, he would ask me what was new in my Divine service. It would give me so much *hitchadshut* (self-renewal). But now I feel nothing at all.

"I felt very dispirited until I reached the place where we literally call out to God's chassidim that they should sing to Him. I didn't know how I could even say that. Then I remembered the Rebbe telling me that if things are hard, one should encourage himself with a *niggun*, a holy melody. I began to appreciate all the kindnesses that God has done for me. After I sang for twenty minutes, the bitterness was gone. I was so filled with vitality that I was able to say the prayers with real joy!"

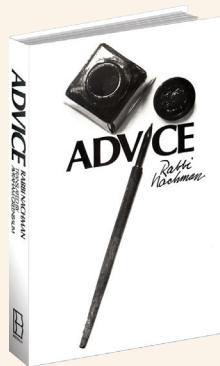
Based on Tovot Zikhronot

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HONOR. 8. An old man who has forgotten his learning through no fault of his own should be accorded every respect. The honor that is given to him will cause his forgetfulness to disappear and the vital soul – the Torah that he knew – to be revealed again (Likutey Moharan I, 37:5).

9. We should also be very careful to give respect to the children of very ignorant, ordinary Jews. In certain cases, the children of very ignorant people have souls that are very precious. ... By honoring them, the Torah that is hidden within them will be revealed more fully, and this gives strength to spiritual forces – form, light, wisdom, life, love and memory – as opposed to bodily forces – substance, desire, darkness and folly (ibid. I, 37:7).



10. There are leaders who go by the name of rabbi but whose learning has been picked up from the "superficialities" and "waste" of Torah. They are unable to control even themselves, let alone other people. But they still have pretensions to greatness and seek to lead and guide the whole world. You should be very careful to accord them no recognition whatsoever so as not to add in any way to their power or authority. They themselves can be forgiven for what they do; they are no more than the victims of a strong lust for power. But the people who give them credibility and power will pay a heavy penalty (ibid. I, 61:2).

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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.

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon