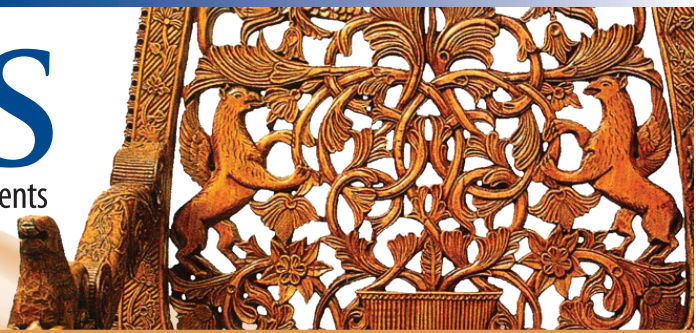


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Fire and Light

By Yossi Katz

THIS PAST WEEK we were tested in the most challenging way: for several days we were forced to deal with a massive BLACKOUT! Electricity has become such a standard part of our lives that we fail to appreciate how many things now depend on being connected to the grid, including hot water, gas range, cell-phone charger, washer and dryer, air conditioner and, most important of all, light!

Light allows us to see and experience, to learn and to know. With light, everything is clearly revealed and obvious to us; without it, we're in the dark, not sure what's right in front of our own nose.

It seems most fitting that the blackout occurred during this period of the three weeks of mourning over the loss of our Holy Temple. The Temple illuminated the entire world with knowledge of God; within its walls, one could experience the most exalted spiritual encounter. To our great loss, "From on high He sent a fire" (Lamentations 1:13). Instead of light, fire ravaged our Temple. Instead of the Divine Presence dwelling in the Temple, now She wails at the place of the remaining Western Wall.

Whereas light was created at the beginning of Creation, fire is the result of man's doing. Fire represents the natural order, where the Divine origin is hidden and man harnesses this energy to build and conquer. Our Sages teach, "On Motza'ey Shabbat the Holy One, blessed be He, gave intelligence to Adam like that found on high; and he [Adam] brought two stones and ground them together and fire emerged from them" (*Pesachim* 54a). On Shabbat, the day of rest, we acknowledge God's role in creating the universe. On Motza'ey Shabbat, when this special spirit takes leave and God's light is once again hidden, we perform Havdalah with fire and recite the blessing "Blessed are You...Who created the luminaries of fire." Our Sages wanted to insure that we are never

deluded to think that we control fate based on how well we manipulate nature.

Fire and everything else have been created for a specific purpose; they are manipulated according to God's needs. God synthesizes the myriads of these "tools" to arrive at a specific outcome. Nature is a reflection of the Divine.

A mikvah must contain forty *se'ah* of water. The number 40 represents the forty days it takes for the embryo to form in the mother's womb. The mikvah therefore symbolizes new birth and dramatic change. If a Jew purchases from a heathen a vessel that will be used to contain food, the *halakhah* requires that he immerse it in the mikvah before using it. This is because eating is a spiritual experience which imparts recognition of God (therefore we give thanks for the food we have consumed). Since the heathen used the vessel in a secular way, devoid of Godliness, it is first submerged in the transformational waters of the mikvah to make it suitable for a Jew and his spiritual needs.

However, our *parashah* states, "Everything that goes into fire, you should pass through fire and purge" (Numbers 31:23). The *halakhah* follows that if one cooks non-kosher food in a pot over a fire, the non-kosher food is absorbed into the pot. The pot can be made kosher again only by having it pass through fire, the source that made it non-kosher.

When we live with clarity and faith that everything in our lives is an expression of God's Oneness, we are free to utilize everything that He has created. In the same way that the mikvah imparts transformation, with a measure of thoughtfulness, our every experience and encounter can serve to expand our appreciation of God. But if we lose this true perspective by subscribing to the laws of nature, we will remain in a perpetual state of disconnect. Only if we face the non-kosher source of our beliefs, and challenge every false notion we have lived with, can we merit to turn on the lights once again.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Netilat Yadayim 2

A Jailhouse Lesson

By Chaim Kramer

FOLLOWING REBBE NACHMAN'S passing, Reb Noson endured years of oppression by Jewish opponents who wanted to put an end to Breslov Chassidut. At one point, Reb Noson was arrested and tried on trumped-up charges. He was thrown into the Breslov prison in a cell with thieves and murderers.

In Russia, the first thing the detainees demanded of a new prisoner was money for alcoholic drinks. Reb Noson had nothing, but they didn't believe him. They twisted several pieces of cord into a thick rope with which to strike him. Just as they raised the rope against him, Reb Noson let out a terrifying scream. The warden came running and Reb Noson told him what his cellmates wanted to do. He asked to be moved to a different cell. The warden refused, but warned the other detainees not to lift a finger to harm Reb Noson.

Reb Noson spent ten days in jail until the Breslover chassidim were able to release him on bail. Even in prison, Reb Noson attached himself to HaShem and was steadfast in his devotions—praying loudly, studying Torah, and keeping up his *Chatzos* prayers at night. His prayers were so intense that the other prisoners complained he never let them sleep.

During this time, he also authored the discourse found in *Likutey Halachot*, *Yayin Nesekh* 4, which emphasizes the harm done by alcohol—what his cellmates had demanded of him. It also discusses the imprisonment of an innocent person, which Reb Noson compares to the way a person's evil desires close in on him. The only way one can be saved from such “incarceration” is through abundant prayer.

Upon his release a few days before Tisha B'Av, Reb Noson wrote to his son Reb Yitzchak:

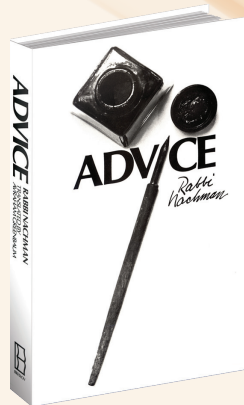
For the moment, speech must be reined in. Let us “put our mouths in the dust, perhaps there will be hope” (Lamentations 3:29). Perhaps, perhaps... Even if you write to me a thousand times about your suffering, I, too, have had thousands upon thousands of bitter moments. ... Other people have also had to endure wave after wave of suffering. ... Each day, everyone suffers all kinds of bitterness. All of it stems from the destruction of the Holy Temple, which is the main source of holiness, the main source of life.

*From “Through Fire and Water:
The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov”*

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

MOCKERY. 1. People who make fun of the words of the Sages are punished with boiling excrement (*Gittin* 56a). Stinking vapors rise up to their brains, leaving them twisted and confused. No matter how much they may study Torah, they will never be able to derive true guidance from it about the way to lead their lives. Their hearts are as filthy as a privy. They never have a clear idea how to live at all.



This kind of cynicism leads in the end to severe decrees being passed against the Jewish people. They are expelled from the countries they were living in, and the end result of the upheavals is that whole areas of Torah wisdom become lost to us, notably the mystery of *Ibbur*, which underlies the

structure of the Jewish calendar with its intercalated leap years. The loss of this wisdom causes strife and factionalism (*Likutey Moharan* I, 61:1-3).

2. An enormous number of religious books are available today, and in the future even more will be written. On no account should one ever make fun of any of them. The world needs every one of them (*ibid.* I, 61:5).

3. When a person makes fun of something holy, it is “the laughter of the fool” (*Ecclesiastes* 7:6). The remedy for mockery is *tikkun habrit*, guarding the covenant (*ibid.* II, 83).



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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.