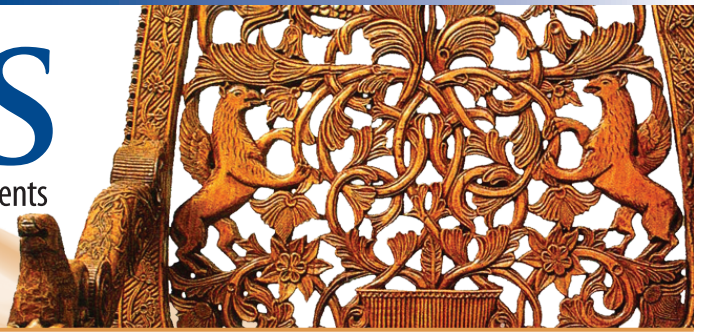


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Poor Man's Offering

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF THE greatest gifts that Chassidic teachings impart to us is the ability to illuminate and make relevant all parts of Torah, even the seemingly obscure ones. The teachings of Rebbe Nachman and Reb Noson make the Torah come alive, helping us find answers and life advice in verses of the Torah that cynics claim are irrelevant and archaic. These incredible teachings reinforce our belief in the profound depth and truth of the Torah and its authentic interpreters, the Tzaddikim.

One such idea that seems to be “out of date” is the idea of animal sacrifices. The Torah states, “When a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to God, from animals” (Leviticus 1:2). Rebbe Nachman shines a beautiful light on one of the lessons that we can glean from the Temple sacrifices even today:

When people want to become truly religious and serve God, they seem to be overwhelmed with confusion and frustrations. They find great barriers in their path and cannot decide what to do. The more they want to serve God, the more difficulty they encounter.

All the enthusiasm that such people have when trying to do good is very precious, even if their goal is not achieved. All their effort is counted like a sacrifice... You may wish to perfect and sanctify yourself, but find yourself unable to do so. Still, the effort and suffering involved in the frustrated attempt are not in vain. They are all an offering to God. ...

Therefore, always do your part, making every effort to serve God to the best of your ability. ... Do everything in your ability, and God will do what is good in His eyes (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom #12).

Reb Noson elaborates on this idea by illuminating one of the laws of the *minchah* offering. The *minchah* offering is often brought by the poor; since they cannot afford the price of an animal, they are instructed to bring an offering of flour instead. Yet when referring to the one who brings this offering, the Torah calls him a “soul” rather than a “man.” Rashi explains that it is as if God is saying, “I consider it as if he has sacrificed his very soul!”

One may never assume, God forbid, that because of all his shortcomings and errors, he cannot come close to God. On the contrary! Just like the poor man who can't bring an expensive animal, he can still gather together a few pennies and offer flour. God values the sincere offering of the pauper – whether he lacks materially or spiritually.

Our Rabbis teach that today our prayers are in place of the sacrifices and Temple offerings. When someone feels his physicality and smallness before God and pours out his heart before his Father in Heaven – even if it seems he can't concentrate properly or have the right intentions – that prayer has great value on high. “He has neither despised nor abhorred the cry of the poor, neither has He hidden His face from him; and when he cried out to Him, He heard” (Psalms 22:25).

The main thing is for us to act humbly, pouring forth our sincerest thoughts and desires in conversation with God. Then, despite whatever personal shortcomings we have, God will turn to us wherever we are. Furthermore, these prayers that are offered from a position of distance and lowliness are most valued and potent. May we all merit to bring the poor man's offering – today!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefillat Minchah 7

Steer Clear!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN BRESLOVER CHASSIDIM would find one of their number on the margins of a conflict or controversy, they would offer gentle rebuke to discourage the friend from getting involved. “Rebbe Nachman once said, ‘In the ultimate future, there will be kings and leaders of nations who will want to avoid fighting any wars. All they wish for is peace and tranquility. They will not be able to do this, however. They will be grabbed by the hairs of their head and forced to fight against their will!’”

The same holds true for every conflict. Even though many people prefer peace, each side feels the need to convince others to join the fray, arguing endlessly until they feel they have convinced the wretched person to endorse their side. They desperately want to rope even the most passive person into their disagreement. We all need to keep this in mind and avoid taking sides in any argument, ignoring whatever pressures we may have to bear.

The chassidim would continue, “You might wonder how to steer clear of dispute. The answer is to simply flee the scene of the conflict! If you can’t run away, be careful to never express an opinion that seems to take one side over the other. Doing so can cause endless, unnecessary slander and heartache. It is so easy to take sides and become part of a dispute which really has nothing to do with you!”

Breslover chassidim were no strangers to opposition, so it seems difficult to understand how they managed against their opponents without arguing. Earlier chassidim laid out a general plan for dealing with those times when one’s commitment to the Rebbe’s path is under attack: “Unless you are certain that your words will make a positive impression, it is better to remain silent in the face of adversity. Better to swallow your words and silently bear insult than to amplify your negative traits by engaging in a fight.”

Reb Aharon Kiblitchev said about an elderly man who had passed away, “Although he was persecuted by others, he never fought against anyone his entire life.” This is high praise for a human being: to have lived without conflict in a world that is fraught with fighting and hatred.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh IV:92, VII:147, VIII:117

SIDEPATH

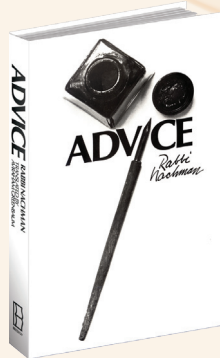
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE. 19. The more divisions among the enemy, the greater their power of endurance. When they unite, however, they very quickly suck dry the source of their life-force, which is in the waste substances of the brain, and they soon collapse (*Likutey Moharan I, 87:6*).

20. The urge to dominate has its source in the blood with which a person has not yet served God. He must see to it that he serves God with every single drop of blood in his body. He must pour forth words of Torah and prayer until all his blood has been turned into words of holiness. Then he will attain peace and his urge to argue and dominate will disappear (*ibid. I, 75*).

21. One who restrains his impulse to take part in disputes will be worthy of being quoted by name for his legal rulings. After his passing he will dwell in both worlds, the World to Come and this world, where his name will still be mentioned. It will be as if he is not dead at all (*ibid. I, 145*).

22. Arguments and infighting make it difficult for a person to pray and speak words of holiness. This is why before we begin our prayers we must take upon ourselves the mitzvah of “Love your neighbor as yourself” (*Leviticus 19:18*) in order to draw love and peace into the world. Peace is the root and source of speech (*Likutey Moharan I, 239*).



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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.