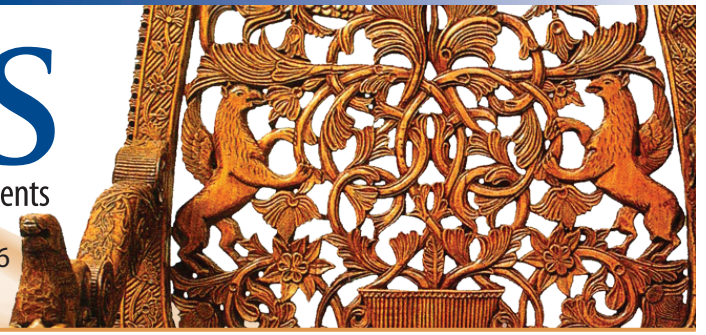


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT ACHAREY MOT-KEDOSHIM • 5780 • VOL. 10 NO. 26

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Every Day Counts

By Yossi Katz

IF YOU'VE EVER prayed in a Breslov shul during these days of counting the Omer, then you've witnessed the incredible intensity and devotion that Breslov Chassidim invest in their Omer counting. The whole service, perhaps one page long, can take up to an hour for them to recite. Obviously, this practice must be very meaningful and tremendously important. (If you have a chance, go to a Breslov shul and experience it for yourself!)

What exactly is the Omer offering? The offering is barley; on the second day of Pesach, an Omer (a measure equal to approximately 2 quarts) of barley was waved in the six directions (north, south, east, west, up and down). Barley is traditionally considered animal food. What kind of offering is this, anyway?

Moreover, the 49 days of the Omer correspond to the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. These days are considered preparatory days, when we ascend from the 49 levels of impurity in Egypt and rise to the 50th level of holiness, becoming fit to receive the Torah on Shavuot. What is the connection between counting the Omer and building our personal capacity for receiving the Torah?

Part of the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was not just the destruction of our enemies, but also our spiritual rescue: a spiritually despondent nation became elevated to incredible new heights. When we tasted our awesome potential, not only were our bodies redeemed, but so were our spirits. However, this presented a problem. Since we didn't initiate this process, we weren't capable of permanently maintaining our new connection with God. Just as it's unhealthy for a nutritionally destitute person to immediately overload on nutritionally dense food, so too, we are incapable of maintaining this new, elevated level. We have to take a few steps back and begin to build strong enough vessels to hold the awesome light. These are the 49 days.

We need animal food in order to build our spiritual muscles. We must become strong enough to lift even the lowest,

most challenging encounter and wave it in all six directions, symbolizing that God is everywhere and in everything.

Life is not just about experiencing miraculous revelations of Godliness, but about seeing Him and connecting to Him even when the worst perceived "garbage" is thrown at us. There are only seven days in a week. The Kabbalah explains that each day can be subdivided further to include all seven days within it. The 49 days of the Omer are therefore a microcosm of every conceivable type of day that's possible to experience. In order to rise to the level of being able to receive the Torah, we must first learn to appreciate each and every day as being a unique and worthy vessel with which to experience Godliness. During the Omer counting, we are correcting our "free ride" out of Egypt and engaging in the process necessary to build a true connection with our Creator.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once abducted by the Soviet authorities and taken in the middle of the night to Siberia without even his coat. After his release, he met a great Rabbi who asked him, "How did you manage to keep going during such a difficult time?"

Rabbi Abramsky answered that he was taken with nothing but the shirt on his back, no overcoat, *tallit* or *tefillin*. When he woke up in the morning and wanted to say "*Modeh ani*," thanking God for His many kindnesses, he found this most difficult. What was there to be thankful for? But then he reached the words "*rabba emunasecha*" (great is Your faith). He then thought, "I still have my faith!" He realized that the most precious and powerful thing in the world still remained with him.

The Rabbi replied, "It was worth you experiencing this entire horrible ordeal in order to attain this level of faith."

The laws of the Omer counting stress that one should not miss counting even a single day. This is the law of life itself. Each person has awesome spiritual potential; each of us can reach the 50th level of holiness – the level of personally receiving the Torah at Sinai. But first, we must learn to count today. Have you counted yet?

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pikadon 4

The Burnt Book

By Chaim Kramer

WHILE REBBE NACHMAN left us many original and practical teachings, he ordered one of his works to be burned. This was the *Sefer HaNisraf*, “the Burnt Book.”

In 1807 Rebbe Nachman called his main disciple and scribe, Reb Noson, to his room to continue the transcription they had begun over two years earlier. Reb Noson writes:

“I sat with the Rebbe for several hours. He dictated the work word by word, and I wrote. All the other chassidim waited outside. When I finally came out, I scarcely knew the difference between day and night. Even though I had no idea what I had written, the little distant glimmer of understanding I had of the awesome greatness of this work filled me with such fire and passion that I hardly knew where I was in the world.”

But he would never have the chance to study it. In 1808, when the Rebbe was critically ill in Lemberg, he told his disciple, Reb Shimon, that he had a decision to make: either he had to burn the book, or else die in Lemberg. The answer seemed obvious to Reb Shimon, but the Rebbe hesitated, because he, and only he, knew of the exaltedness of the teachings contained in the book.

Finally the Rebbe said, “If that is the case, here is the key to my drawer. Go quickly! Hurry! Don’t delay! ... Go as fast as you can to Breslov. When you get there, take two books – one of them is lying in my drawer, the second is in my daughter Adil’s chest. Take them and burn them. But for God’s sake, be as quick as you can!”

Reb Shimon ran out to hire a coach. When he reached Dashev, not far from Breslov, he suddenly fell ill and was bedridden. He ordered that he be carried out to the coach and laid inside. As soon as the coach arrived in Breslov, his health returned. He took the two books (the original and Reb Noson’s copy) and burned them both.

Reb Noson concludes, “The Rebbe said this book would not come into the world again. We lost something that will never return. The Rebbe said that this book had to be burned, and his other work, the *Likutey Moharan*, would be the one to be printed and spread throughout the world.”

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

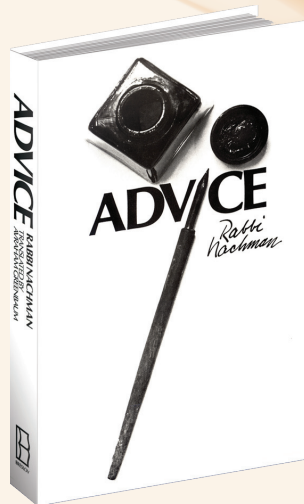
SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

BARRIERS. 1. All the barriers and obstacles that confront a person have only one purpose: to heighten his yearning for the holy deed which he needs to accomplish. It is part of man’s nature that the greater the barriers standing in the way of a certain goal, the more he desires to achieve it.

When a Jew needs to do something whose purpose is to strengthen his very core, especially when it is something upon which his whole being as a Jew depends – to travel to the true tzaddik – he is given desire from above. The desire is created through the barrier that is sent to him, and the barrier itself causes his yearning to grow.

You should understand, therefore, that there is no barrier in the world that you cannot break if you want to. The entire purpose of the barrier is only to increase your desire. When you achieve the necessary desire and yearning for the holy act you need to accomplish, you will surely succeed in transforming the idea that is in your mind into an actual reality. The barrier itself can bring you to succeed by strengthening your desire to do so (*Likutey Moharan* I, 66:4).



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Pathways is a weekly publication. To subscribe, please visit breslov.org/pathways. To make a dedication, please email pathways@breslov.org.

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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.