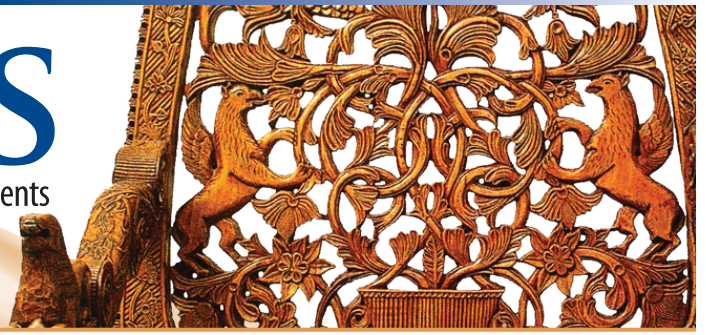


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Barley Test

By Yossi Katz

ASIDE FROM BEING part of my delicious Shabbat cholent, barley has never been a food that I find myself craving. Luckily, throughout *Likutey Halakhot*, Reb Noson refers to it as “animal fodder.” Even more interesting, only two Temple offerings consisted of barley: the Omer offering, which we are commanded to bring in this week’s *parashah* (Leviticus 23:14), and the *Sotah* offering (more about this soon). What do these two have in common, and why are they both so fortunate to consist of this grain?

If a husband becomes suspicious of his wife and warns her not to seclude herself with a certain man, and nevertheless she chooses to do so, she must be brought in front of 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).

Now, even if she is found innocent of her husband’s major accusation, the Torah still considers her 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). Our Sages explain that one does not sin unless a spirit of folly first enters into him or her. Someone with true reasoning could never fall to such temptation.

By secluding herself with another man, the *Sotah* did something born of complete folly, and this is why she must now be investigated by bringing an offering that

consists of animal food. Just as animals act only according to their impulses without any higher reasoning, so has the *Sotah* woman acted.

The *Zohar* explains that just as the *Sotah* is tested through barley, so too, the Jewish people are tested through the barley of the Omer offering to see if they are a “woman of valor.” (*Zohar, Raya Mehemna, Emor*).

By bringing the Omer offering, we are identifying with the *Sotah*, saying, “True, we, too, have secluded ourselves with temptation and mindlessness; we, too, have sunken to very promiscuous places. However, we will prove that we are still faithful, and that we are indeed ‘women of valor.’” We then wave the Omer offering in every direction, demonstrating our faith that God is still with us and that He is everywhere – He is over us, He is next to us and He is even below us!

We are currently in the period of time when we are trying to purify ourselves from the filth of our bitter bondage and servitude in Egypt and in our personal spiritual exiles. Yes, we want to become God’s elevated and enlightened People by receiving the Torah at Sinai – but we should know that it will be a long process.

During this process, we must suffer constant setbacks, falls and shortcomings. But this is the test of our valor: Will we remain strong and determined? And this is why every day we count “the days to the Omer.” We connect each and every day to the Omer by remembering that just as the Omer was waved in every direction, so too, God is always with us and next to us. There is no reason to despair at all! Let us prove this to God and to ourselves! As the wisest of men, King Solomon, said, “A woman of valor, who can find? For her price is beyond pearls” (Proverbs 31:10).

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Pesach 9

Too Easy

By Gedaliah Fleer

WHEN RABBI AVRAHAM STERNHARTZ was the Rav of Kremenchug, the head of the community once urgently knocked at his door. Some soldiers had arrived, demanding 50,000 rubles for the release of two Jews. If the community didn't pay the ransom by evening, they would kill the hostages.

"This certainly warrants my attention," cried Rabbi Sternhartz. "It's a great mitzvah to redeem a captive Jew!"

He hurried to the home of one of the wealthy residents. "How much do you want me to give?" the man asked. "Ten thousand rubles," replied Rabbi Sternhartz. "What?" exclaimed the wealthy man. "For such an important mitzvah, you're only asking for 10,000? I will give you 20,000!" At the next house, Rabbi Sternhartz asked for 5,000 rubles and the wealthy benefactor gave him 10,000. This scenario repeated itself at almost every house he visited, until he had accumulated the entire 50,000 rubles in a short time.

But before delivering the ransom to the soldiers, Rabbi Sternhartz told the community head, "Give all the money back to the donors."

"What about the captured Jews?" the community head exclaimed.

"Take ten strong boys from the yeshivah and let them pretend they're delivering the money," Rabbi Sternhartz advised. "Instead, they will attack the soldiers and free the hostages."

The community head was shocked. Such behavior could result in a pogrom. "Whenever you have listened to me in the past, I have not been wrong," Rabbi Sternhartz said. "Now, do what I say and God will assist us."

The community head accompanied the ten boys to the village square and watched as they attacked the soldiers. The soldiers screamed and begged for mercy. "The Jews ruin everything," they sobbed. "We were walking peacefully when we met these two Jews who suggested that we pretend to hold them for ransom and split the profits." The two Jews and the soldiers were chased out of town in disgrace.

Afterwards the community head visited Rabbi Sternhartz. "We always realized you were a true tzaddik, but we never knew you were a prophet!" he said.

"I'm not a prophet," Rabbi Sternhartz replied. "But I learned from my teachers that a mitzvah never comes easily. When I was able to collect the money so quickly, I realized that this collection was *not* for a mitzvah."

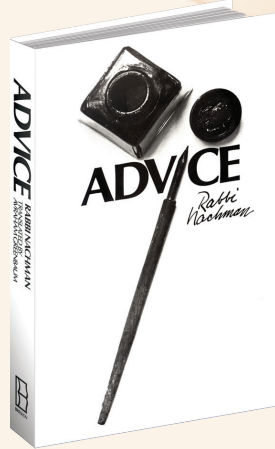
SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

BARRIERS. 2. The greater the goal for which you yearn, the bigger the obstacles and barriers that are sent in order to strengthen your desire. For desire is in proportion to the magnitude of the barriers.

From this you can understand that if tremendous barriers spring up on every side as you start to draw near to the tzaddik, it is an indication of the importance of the goal you wish to achieve. There are always difficulties and obstacles when you try to do anything holy. This is especially true when you want to make the journey to the true tzaddikim, because this is the foundation for everything else. Obstacles appear like at no other time. There are many tzaddikim. But there is a single point of truth to be found in their midst. When you seek to draw closer to this point of

truth – and everything depends on this – you will find obstacles and barriers springing up and confronting you on every side. You need fierce determination: you must strengthen your desire and will power in proportion to the greatness of the goal you are aiming for. Then you will succeed in breaking the barriers and attaining your goal. There is no barrier in the world that a person cannot break, so long as he has the desire and will power to do so (*Likutey Moharan I, 66:4*).



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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.