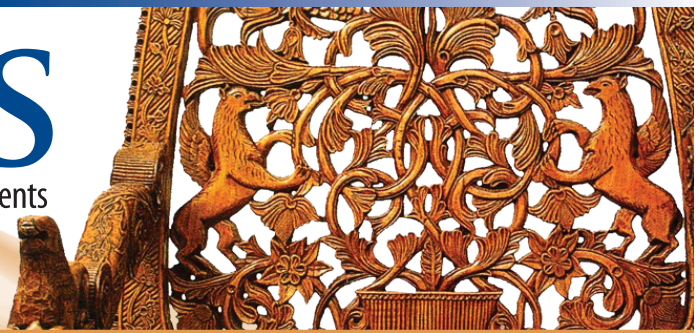


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Shavuot: Our Personal “Giving of the Torah”

By Yossi Katz

AFTER MANY YEARS of bitter bondage in Egypt, the poor Hebrew slaves emerge victorious and triumphant over their Egyptian slave masters. As they make their way through the desert, they approach Mount Sinai and the purpose of Creation, where the lowest of the low rise to become God’s chosen people.

Moses delivers God’s question to the Hebrews: “Will you accept the Torah and thereby become a treasure among the nations?” They answer, “All that God has spoken, we will do.” Moses then brings the people’s reply to God. God informs Moses that He will appear to him and the people will hear what He says.

But then we read one of the most mysterious verses in the Torah: “Moses related the people’s reply to God.” But where was the question, and what was the answer? The Torah does not reveal this to us (see Exodus 19).

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In *Likutey Moharan* I, 190, Rebbe Nachman explains what was going on behind the scenes. When the Israelites reply, “All that God has spoken, *we will do*,” they were actually objecting to God’s question. If God outright tells us what to do, how can we possibly maintain our free will? “We will” have to “do” it. Moses brings this question before God.

God replies that He will appear to Moses specifically and address the commandments to him alone; the Jewish people will hear them only as bystanders, thus retaining their freedom of choice.

But then Moses asks, “What about me and my freedom of choice?” This is the meaning of the second occurrence of “Moses related the people’s reply to God,” where the question and answer were not recorded by the Torah. Rebbe Nachman reveals that Moses was repeating the Jewish people’s objection, but this time about himself!

God responds, “Go to the Jewish people and sanctify them today and tomorrow” (and then the Torah will be given). God did not specify explicitly that three days of preparation were necessary in order to receive the Torah; Moses had to grasp this on his own and command the Jewish people to add the extra day (see *Shabbat* 87a for Moses’ calculation). Remarkably, this means that even the giving of the Torah was dependent on Moses’ free will.

Where does this leave us? Are we tzaddikim who are on a level where we have both the ability and need to grasp God’s hidden will? Reb Noson says yes. Even though the Torah has already been given and the *mitzvot* are known to us, we need good advice and ideas to fulfill the commandments in the best possible way.

We also need to find our individual paths within Judaism, and we need to attach ourselves to the proper teacher/tzaddik. All of this has to be done on our own.

Reb Noson adds that if we concentrate on our eternal purpose, we will discover the hints along the way that lead us to our own personal “giving of the Torah.”

Based on Likutey Halachot Birkhat HaShachar 5

Shavuot in Egypt

By Chaim Kramer

TODAY REBBE NACHMAN'S teachings are known far and wide, but in the early nineteenth century his sphere of influence was limited to Eastern Europe. Reb Noson began introducing the Rebbe's books to Jews in other lands during his pilgrimage to the Land of Israel in 1822.

In Alexandria Reb Noson was directed to the home of the *chazan* of the synagogue. There he met Reb Aharon, a visitor from Salonika, who asked him if he had any new books. "I told him right away that I had a new book that no one in that country had seen yet: *Likutey Moharan*," Reb Noson later wrote. "There I was in exile in Egypt, in Alexandria — a place I never in my life thought I would ever visit — and I had the privilege of mentioning the Rebbe's holy book. If this was the only reason I had come there, it was enough, especially as I now saw that I would be able to sell some books, as indeed I did."

In Alexandria Reb Noson was introduced to the unique customs of the Sephardim. He sat on straw mats with his hosts, eating noodles and cheese with his fingers, as they did. He listened as a number of young men came in to read *Parashat Bamidbar* in the Sephardic cantillation.

On Shavuot, Reb Noson and his companion stayed up the entire night, which was nearly twice as long as a Ukrainian summer night. They recited the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* and joined the Sephardim in songs and praises to God. "All over the world, Jews are singing to God and praising Him," thought Reb Noson. One of his greatest joys was that he was able to develop some original thoughts about the Giving of the Torah.

As soon as Yom Tov was over, Reb Noson asked the Rav of Alexandria for help in collecting funds to cover his expenses for the final leg of his journey to the Land of Israel. The Rav agreed, and he also bought a number of books, including *Likutey Moharan* and *The Aleph-Bet Book*. Reb Aharon bought the same books to take back to Salonika, where there were even more Jews than in Istanbul.

What brought Reb Noson the greatest joy of all was the fact that Rebbe Nachman's teachings were beginning to spread far beyond the Ukraine to the Jewish world at large.

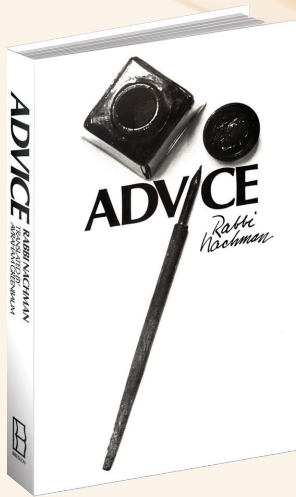
From "Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov"

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

BARRIERS. 6. The way to begin serving God is to imagine there is no one else in the entire world except you. Pay no attention to anyone who puts obstacles in your way, whether it is your father or mother, your parents-in-law, your wife, your children or anyone else. There are certain people who can make things difficult for you by ridiculing you or offering temptations and so on. Don't pay the slightest attention to any of them. It is written that "Abraham was one" (Ezekiel 33:24) – Abraham was alone! You must also be alone – as if you were the only one in the world (*Likutey Moharan* II, Prologue).

7. People often imagine that the barriers they experience in their efforts to serve God are so great that they will never be able to break them. But this is not true. No one is ever confronted with barriers he cannot break if he really wants to. God only sends a person obstacles that are within his capacity to overcome if he is really determined enough. If he thinks about it carefully, he will realize that the obstacle is really a veil for God Himself. In reality, there are no obstacles at all. They are simply an illusion (*ibid.* II, 46).



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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.