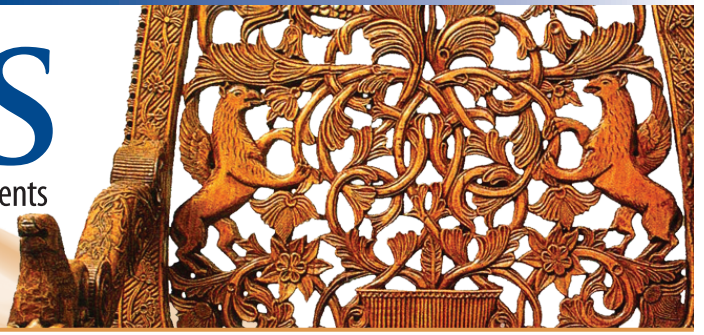


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Should We Laugh or Cry?

By Yossi Katz

WHEN I THINK of the summer, I imagine people reclining on golden, sandy beaches, letting the cool waves wash up against their feet. They have no worries at all, just lots of time to relax and enjoy.

The Jewish calendar is our spiritual compass; it points us in the direction we should be heading. Just as the summer beckons, the Three Weeks come along and restrict us from some of those pleasures. Then comes the Nine Days, further impacting our summer vacation plans. Is our Jewish calendar anti-Semitic? This oddity has always bothered me, particularly in the summer!

Our Rabbis make a very interesting connection. They teach that a hen lays her egg after 21 days. Similarly, the *luz* (usually translated as almond) tree takes 21 days from the time it flowers until its fruit ripens (see *Bekhorot* 8a). Rebbe Nachman explains that these 21 days allude to the Three Weeks; 21 days are the necessary incubation period before a rebirth. This is why it is the *luz* bone of the spine that will remain in the grave after the rest of the body has decomposed, and from it, the body will be built anew at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead. Likewise, the eating of the egg at the final meal before Tisha B'Av begins symbolizes the rebirth we will experience on that day, as we have been taught that Mashiach will be born on Tisha B'Av and that day will eventually become a festival (see *Likutey Moharan* II, 85:2).

But something is very odd about this whole process. On the one hand, the *luz* symbolizes future rebirth, but why then does it ripen after 21 days, which represent mourning and sadness (and our being restricted from

the summer festivities)? And why does the same egg that we eat at the mourner's meal right before the onset of Tisha B'Av also symbolize rebirth? As they say, "Should we laugh or cry?"

We can answer this riddle and solve the timing of the Jewish calendar by examining a kosher egg. The sign of a kosher egg is one round end and one pointy end. Isaiah said, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword" (Isaiah 49:2). The pointy or sharp side corresponds to the times we experience great joy and festivity. We can laugh and scream with our mouths. But there is also a "flip side" – the round end of the egg represents the roundness of the human life cycle, which is why eggs are the traditional meal of mourners.

A kosher egg is the symbol of a healthy and wholesome life. When we were little kids, we viewed life as being just a lot of fun and adventure. Unfortunately, when we got older, the tragedies and difficulties of life made us think only of running away. But the real Jewish attitude is to understand that we are here for a purpose. God is constantly bringing the world closer to its rectification. When we are able to understand that this is a difficult process, but at the end we will merit a spiritual rebirth, the difficulties become lined with an awesome feeling of consolation and closeness to God.

Imagine the joy a mother feels after nine months of difficult childbearing, when she can finally hold her baby in her arms. With our *emunah* (faith), we can experience this consolation even now, during the Three Weeks, and also during all of life's challenges. The contrast between summer vacation and the timing of the Jewish calendar creates the feeling necessary to take part in this process. The egg eaten on the eve of Tisha B'Av reminds us that even at the greatest moment of tribulation, redemption is already in play.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Beitzim 5

Look Up!

ONE OF THE Rebbe's followers, Reb Chaikel, had a relative who was extremely poor. Once, while traveling with Rebbe Nachman, Reb Chaikel instructed the wagon driver to stop at this relative's house. Inside, Reb Chaikel pointed out the man's poverty and asked the Rebbe to give him a blessing for wealth.

The Rebbe said to Reb Chaikel, "I have no blessings for him. If you want him to have a blessing, you give it."

After making certain that he'd heard correctly, and obtaining the Rebbe's assurances that he wouldn't mind his "presumptuousness," Reb Chaikel emptied a pitcher of water across the floor. Then he spread the water in all directions, saying, "Abundance to the east, abundance to the west, north and south!" Then Rebbe Nachman and Reb Chaikel left.

Shortly afterward, a group of merchants came to this man's home seeking to purchase food and drink. When the man told them that he had none, they gave him money to buy it for them. From then on, whenever these merchants came to the area, they would lodge at the man's house, and they eventually commissioned him to sell their wares for them. Before long, the man prospered and became very wealthy.

Before, whenever he came to Breslov, this man had always made certain to visit the Rebbe. But now, the more he prospered, the more engrossed he became in his business dealings. He no longer had the time to visit the Rebbe.

Once, while rushing around Breslov on business, he passed by the Rebbe's house. Rebbe Nachman saw him and called him in. "Did you glance at the sky today?" the Rebbe asked him. The man replied that he hadn't. Calling him to the window, the Rebbe said, "Tell me what you see." "I see wagons and horses and people scurrying about," the man replied.

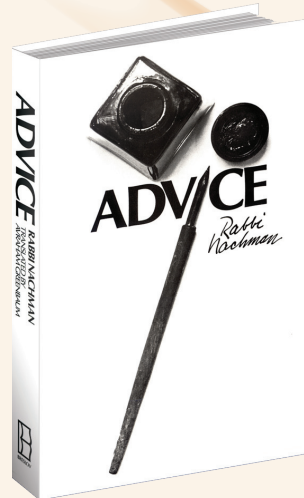
"Believe me," Rebbe Nachman said, "fifty years from now there will be other market days. There will be other horses, other wagons, different people. What is here today will no longer be. I ask you, what pressure are you under? What's making you so busy that you don't even have time to look at Heaven?"

Based on Kokhavye Or #5, p. 41

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SHABBAT. 9. The radiance that Shabbat brings into the world stirs men to return to God out of love. When this happens, relief and healing are granted to the righteous in place of the trials and suffering they had to endure previously. People come to see them in a



new light, they begin to understand the true greatness and beauty of their souls, and they start to treat them with respect and dignity. In the individual also, the greater his purity – each on his own level – the greater the radiance and splendor that will shine from his soul, and the higher his standing will be in men's eyes. The greater his personal worth and purity, the

more he will be able to absorb the teachings that the tzaddik of the generation gives over on Shabbat in all their originality and freshness (*Likutey Moharan I, 58:7*).

10. The way to reach such a level of Shabbat observance is by making an effort to bring people closer to God. It is also achieved through *hitbodedut*, in which one speaks with his Maker and examines and judges himself on all his deeds. When one merits this kind of Shabbat observance, the forces of evil and the *kelipot* are destroyed (*ibid. I, 59:1, 3*).



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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.