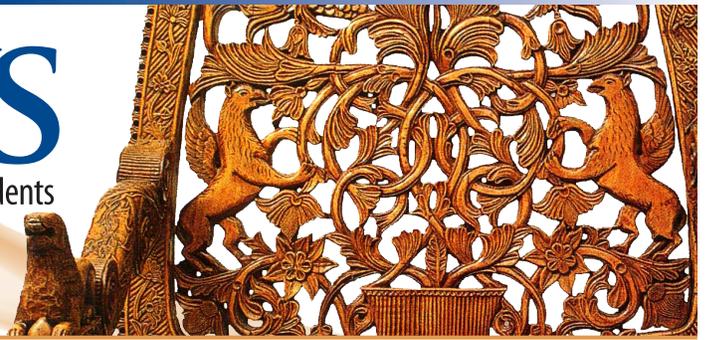


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Golden Calf in the Room

By Ozer Bergman

“The people saw that Moshe was late in descending the mountain. The people converged on Aharon and said to him, ‘Up! Make us a god that will lead us. Because that man Moshe, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we don’t know what happened to him’” (Exodus 32:1).

Rebbe Nachman teaches: “Sometimes [the tzaddik] is with the people in an open manner, making himself accessible to them and associating with them. At other times it’s as if he covers himself, concealing himself and hiding from them, greatly distancing himself from them. And not only does he put himself far from them and keep aloof from them so that they cannot associate with him, but he also becomes the subject of questions and doubts. Their minds become twisted and confused because he has greatly removed himself from them. This is why there are questions and enigmas that surround him.”

Finding and affiliating with a tzaddik/rebbe is a top priority in Rebbe Nachman’s teachings and Chassidic thought in general. In a certain sense, everyone in the world has a “tzaddik”—namely, a person, ideal or idea that he uses as a North Star to base his decisions, stay on track, and/or keep his conscience clear so that he can sleep at night.

When he came back to Egypt, Moshe Rabbeinu was close to the Israelites, explaining who he was, why he had returned, and what was to be done. When it was time to receive the Torah—well, it’s harder to imagine a greater distance between a tzaddik and us, the common folk. We were at the foot of the mountain and he was on the top, personally invited by God (Exodus 19:20), covered in a cloud (ibid., 24:15). Also, he was absent for forty days, a relatively long time. So when Moshe Rabbeinu was late coming down, right away there were questions, which couldn’t, or wouldn’t, be answered.

The lowlifes who converged on Aharon, demanding that he “make a god for us,” didn’t suspend their point of view or consider any other that would have allowed them to believe that Moshe Rabbeinu’s way of doing things was better than theirs. They needed an excuse to justify their “lifestyle choices” (pardon the expression). Inside every human being is a bit of decency, aka Godliness, that pushes him to live a decent, honorable, noble life. But a good deal of indecency also lurks

within. Indecency cannot overcome us with a blatant attack on our goodness, so it disguises itself as a “tzaddik” or as “god.” Personalities, ideas and values, whether famous or obscure, are the “golden calf in the room”: the huge, but unacknowledged, presence in our decision-making.

Choosing a tzaddik does not mean accepting an intermediary (God forbid!), abdicating responsibility, sacrificing (personal) identity,* or looking for a father substitute.** It is an honest, humble admission of responsibility to the Creator: to succeed at being a Jew, I need a teacher. It is also an act of bravery and amazing faith: I am ready to put my eternal fate in the hands of another human being by following his guidance.

True, not everyone who doesn’t choose a proper tzaddik ends up living immorally or doing despicable deeds. Conversely, choosing a proper tzaddik is no guarantee that you’ll never make another poor decision or suffer a major moral lapse. Yet a person who chooses properly is better positioned for Jewish success than if he hadn’t. (This is one advantage of affiliating with a tzaddik. There are others.)

So we must pray, often and intensely, to 1) to realize our shortcomings, 2) successfully avoid incompetents and charlatans, 3) hobnob and learn from great tzaddikim, and 4) not trade the latter for the former. Amen!

* Joining any group means accepting a certain degree of conformity.

** The fact that incompetent leaders and outright charlatans exist are not arguments against having a rebbe. That would be like not buying a car because it may be a lemon, or not getting married because there are horrible marriages.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, #63:2
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person can always direct his thoughts as he chooses, since it is impossible to think two thoughts at once. (Letter #284)

Of Cows and Prayers

By Chaim Kramer

In honor of Shabbat Parah, when we read the Torah portion of the offering of the Red Heifer (Numbers 19:1-22), we present these insights from Rebbe Nachman.

“This is the decree of the Torah that God commanded, saying, ‘Speak to the Jewish people. Let them bring to you a completely red cow that has no blemish and that has never borne a yoke’ (Numbers 19:2).

The Red Heifer purified the Jews from the worst impurities. After the destruction of the Temple, the service of the Red Heifer was annulled. Today, we are able to gain forgiveness through our prayers. The cow in particular represents prayer, as it is written, “We will offer [the words of] our lips instead of cows” (Hosea 14:3). Thus, the purification ceremony of the Red Heifer is reflected today in our prayers.

“A completely red cow”—the color red indicates judgments,

The purification ceremony of the Red Heifer is reflected today in our prayers.

for red is the Supernal Color of Gevurah, which is associated with judgment. The *Zohar* (III, 180b) teaches that the power of the Red Heifer to purify stems from Gevurah.

“That has no blemish”—a person must turn to God in prayer and accept God’s judgments as righteous. When he does so, he diminishes the intensity of the judgments and attains a state of being unblemished.

“That has never borne a yoke”—one must have complete faith in God, free of the yoke of other nations’ idolatrous beliefs.

“Cedar wood, hyssop and crimson wool”—these refer to countering the voices of the wicked during one’s prayers. These “voices” are the sound of foolishness, the sound of philosophers and atheists, and the sound of vilification and mockery. When a person counters these voices, he can pray sincerely and properly, nullifying himself before God. The acts of slaughtering the Red Heifer, burning it to ash, and gathering those ashes also help counter these three types of sounds.

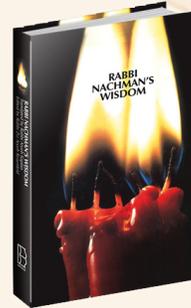
“Burning ash”—this refers to nullifying one’s evil traits, drawing wicked people to serve God, and attaching one’s prayers to those of the tzaddikim.

The *Zohar* (III, 76b) notes that the Red Heifer is associated with the number seven—e.g., the Torah mentions seven immersions (of the body or garment) in this passage, and the Kohen is mentioned seven times. Seven is similarly the aspect of prayer, as it is written, “Seven times a day I praise You” (Psalms 119:164) (*Likutey Moharan I*, 55:3-6).

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l

15. The Rebbe said that it takes both wisdom and great effort to be like an animal. The wisdom one needs to be like a beast is alluded to in the verse “Every wise-hearted man whom God bestowed wisdom is a beast” (Exodus 36:1). (The word *BaHeiMah* [in them] can also be read *BeHeiMaH* [is a beast]).



It is also written, “God saves man and beast” (Psalms 36:7). Our Sages say this refers to “people who are wise and clever, and conduct themselves humbly like an animal” (*Chullin* 5b). This is also the meaning of Asaf’s words: “I was a fool, I did not know, I was like an animal before You” (Psalms 73:22).

16. You can shout loudly in a “small, still voice” (I Kings 19:12). You can scream without anyone hearing you shouting with this soundless, “small, still voice.”

Anyone can do this. Just imagine the sound of such a scream in your mind. Depict the shout in your imagination exactly as it would sound. Keep this up until you are literally screaming with this soundless, “small, still voice.”

This is actually a scream and not mere imagination. Just as some nerves bring the sound from your lungs to your lips, others bring it to the brain. You can draw the sound through these nerves, literally bringing it into your head. When you do this, you are actually shouting inside your brain. You can stand in a crowded room, screaming in this manner, with no one hearing you.



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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.