

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT TAZRIA • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 25

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The Stage is Set

By Yossi Katz

EVERY YEAR MY children come home from *cheder* before *Parashat Shemini* (last week's *parashah*) with coloring books featuring the various kosher and non-kosher animals and fish. My wife remembers coloring the same ones when she was their age!

The interesting thing is that only after the Torah goes into such detail regarding the kosher status of animals and the associated laws of impurity, does it speak about the laws of impurity regarding human beings. This week our *parashah* begins, "If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she will be unclean for seven days" (Leviticus 12:2). Rashi explains that since mankind was formed only after every other living creature had been created, its laws – or "its Torah," as Rashi phrases it – was expounded only after theirs.

I once saw a refrigerator magnet that said something like, "No matter what time Shabbat arrives, I am always ready at the last minute." Interestingly, man was created on the sixth day, right before the onset of Shabbat. Why would God wait until "the last minute"?

Everything in the universe was created for our pleasure. Just as one builds a house, furnishes it and decorates it before moving in, God similarly created the universe and brought mankind onto the scene only when everything was ready for us. Our Rabbis state that the world was created this way so that we could immediately partake of the Shabbat meal (*Sanhedrin* 38a).

But in order for us to enjoy this fine meal and appreciate everything that was created for us, we must first possess a key characteristic: humility. When I understand that God has given me something special that I don't deserve, I will feel blessed and use that gift in a positive way. But if I think that God "owes me" and that I even generated the gift through my own merits, then the gift will lose its value, will not be appreciated, and will likely be misused.

Referring to the creation of the animal kingdom, our Rabbis teach, "If he (man) is worthy, he will rule over the beasts and animals; if not, he will become subservient to them and the beast rules over him" (Rashi on Genesis 1:27). If God blesses me with a car (even a luxury car), if I believe that He was the one who gave it to me, I will appreciate it and use it well. If not, the car will rule over me and I will spend my days waiting for the mechanic to figure out what's wrong with it. This is true regarding spiritual matters as well. If I believe that I can grow spiritually and don't need God's assistance, that I can singlehandedly reach any level, God will take that very thing I am working on and turn it against me. If, for example, I am working on praying with more intensity, I will find myself daydreaming like never before.

There is a second reason for the order of creation. Our Rabbis teach, "Should an egotistic thought enter your mind, remind yourself that the lowly mosquito was created before you" (*Sanhedrin* 38a). Thus, the way to prepare ourselves for spiritual greatness and knowledge is to first humble ourselves and remember where we came from.

Every month, the moon disappears from view. For us to appreciate the new moon and consecrate it, we must first experience it as having been created anew. Our *parashah* therefore begins by describing the process of human birth. Only after we remember that we were created from nothing and, in fact, were created even after the lowliest of creatures made their entrance on the world stage, can "our Torah" be expounded.

By making room for God, by leaving our egos and mindsets on the side, we begin to appreciate the magnanimous gifts that God is waiting to give us. Every day is an entirely new creation that has never existed and will never exist again. Let's take advantage and appreciate today for all it's worth! Amen!

Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Orlah* 5

Praying ... & Believing

IT WAS VERY close to Pesach, and Reb Noson still had no money with which to purchase his family's needs for the holiday.

On the morning of the last market day in the town of Breslov before Pesach, Reb Noson was about to leave for the morning prayers when his wife stopped him. In no uncertain terms, she gave him to "understand" the severity of their situation. Or, as Reb Noson himself described it, "This morning, she taught me a chapter in depression." Even so, Reb Noson reassured himself and went to the synagogue, where he prayed with his usual devotion.

After the prayer service was over, Reb Nachman of Tulchin noticed a complete change in Reb Noson's countenance. The expression on his mentor's face had entirely changed to one of hope and joy, as if all of his prayers had been answered.

Later that day, some of Reb Noson's followers were among the people arriving in Breslov for the market day. They brought with them a considerable sum of money that they gave to Reb Noson for Pesach. It was enough to cover all of his expenses for the holiday.

Reb Nachman of Tulchin later said, "There was a noticeable change on Reb Noson's face after he prayed. But I did not see any change after he received the money."

Such was the power of Reb Noson's faith – he was so certain that his prayers would be answered, it was as if the money were already in his pocket!

Based on Aveneha Barzel #64, p. 75

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

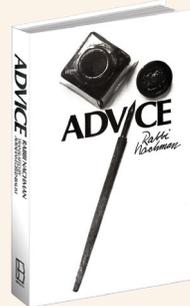
TRUTH AND FAITH. 10. Make sure that you never let your faith become weakened. A person whose faith is weak is unable to accept honest criticism. This is very damaging to the cause of peace because it results in all kinds of aggressiveness, exile and conflict. The end result is godlessness and idolatry, false ideologies and false religions. True faith is the seal of holiness. You must guard it well because you are protecting holiness itself (*Likutey Moharan I, 22:1, 2*).

11. To attain complete faith, you must come to the true Tzaddikim of our era. They alone have the power to explain and communicate the authentic faith of the Jewish people to our generation, and therefore they are the ones who bring faith to the people of this age (*ibid. I, 3*).

12. Faith and truth are a "shining face." They are joy and life. They are the gateway to the "length of days." Falsehood shortens the days of man's life. Falsehood is death and idolatry, a "dark face" (*ibid. I, 23:1*).

13. All the noble qualities of the soul depend on faith. Faith is the foundation and source of all holiness.

14. Even a person who attains a certain level of religious insight and understanding must take good care to ensure that his perception is suffused with faith. Intellect alone is not something to rely on (*ibid., I, 24:6*).



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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.