



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

The Simple Faith of Rebbe Nachman zt"l and Rav Shach zt"l

“You shall be wholehearted with Hashem, your God.” (*Devarim* 18:13)

תקנים תהיה, עם ה' אלקיך (דברים י"ח:יג)

Once, at the Friday night *seudah*, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov started laughing after the fish had been served. No one present could figure out the reason for this; and when he laughed again after the soup they were further puzzled. It happened a third time after the main course, and the chassidim begged their Rebbe for an explanation. The Baal Shem Tov promised that one would be forthcoming after Shabbos.

That *Motza'ei Shabbos* the Baal Shem Tov and his chassidim set out for a certain village. They came to the house of Reb Shabsi Hopstein, an impoverished bookbinder, and the Baal Shem Tov said, “Tell us what happened on Shabbos!”

Replied the man, “Well. it seems you already know that something happened; I will tell you what it was. This *erev* Shabbos we had no food in the house. We had no wine, so I thought we would make *Kiddush* on mead, but we had no mead either! I thought we could use *challos*, but we had none. In fact, we had no food at all! There was nothing I could do but go to the *Beis Medrash* to study; before I left I cautioned my wife not to borrow from the neighbors.”

Reb Shabsi went on, “My wife was despondent about the lack of necessities for Shabbos, but she was determined to do what she could in honor of the sacred day. Recalling that she had a beautiful dress left from her mother stored in the attic, she went upstairs to look for it. To her delight she realized that it had three gold buttons. Hurrying to the market, she sold them to buy food for Shabbos.”

“When I returned from shul and saw the Shabbos table laden with food”, continued the simple bookbinder, “I thought that my wife must have broken her promise, but I decided not to say anything. Then she told me how Hashem had provided for us, by causing her to remember about her mother’s dress, so that she could prepare a beautiful Shabbos without having to accept any help from others. I was so overjoyed that I danced with my wife around

the table! After the next course we danced again, and after the chicken once again.”

Said the Baal Shem Tov to the bookbinder, “When *you* danced, the angels in Heaven were so delighted, they danced as well! And when I saw this, I laughed with joy.”

The little setbacks in life do not overwhelm such a person because they embrace the knowledge and faith that they are not alone

Before leaving their home the Baal Shem Tov asked Reb Shabsi if there is anything he wishes for. Sighing, Reb Shabsi told the *Tzaddik* that after many years he and his wife were still childless. The Baal Shem Tov blessed him and told them that they would have a son that year who would grow up to be a *tzaddik*, and so it was. They named their son Yisrael, after the Baal Shem Tov, and he became famous as the Maggid of Koznitz. (*Gut Voch*, Artscroll, p.248)

This enchanting story speaks of the notion of simplicity. Simple laughter. Simple buttons. A simple dance. A simple Shabbat. Simple and pure love. Chassidic thought often employed the term ‘*Emunah P’shuta*’ to describe the noblest form of faith, a simple faith in Hashem, unadulterated and wholesome.

One of the most well known Chassidic masters to champion the approach of *temimut* regarding our faith in Hashem was Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-

1810). Rebbe Nachman’s great emphasis on simplicity - saying one’s prayers with simple faith and trust, snatching each opportunity to practice charity and kindness, even singing a cheerful song of melody to lift one’s spirits - are all a necessary antidote to the super sophisticated and harried life we often find ourselves in.

Throughout his writings, one finds the Rebbe teaching the lesson of ‘*emunah peshuta*’ or *temimut*: The Rebbe once stated simply, “In order to attain perfection in one’s life one must pursue their *avodat Hashem* with absolute *temimut*, wholeness” (*Likutei Moharan Tinyana*, 19).

The Rebbe, in a memorable lesson, underscores the wonderful benefits of a life lived with such a perspective. Conversely, one lacking ‘simple faith’ is prone to be burdened with more sadness or heaviness; “Because certainly, one whose mind and heart is filled with pure faith believes that Hashem is watching over and hears every word that one utters...certainly one would not feel sadness or weighed down.” (*Likutei Moharan* 155).

Even more, a person filled with wholehearted faith, says the Rebbe, remains optimistic and positive. Such a person is filled with courage and fortitude knowing that Hashem is at his or her side. The little setbacks in life do not overwhelm

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such a person because they embrace the knowledge and faith that they are not alone and that there is a guiding hand at every turn. Ultimately this leads to a state of joy and happiness that we are all searching to achieve.

Rebbe Nachman in this noteworthy teaching posits that there is a certain location on the globe where *temimut*, simple faith, is most successfully acquired; in the land of Israel; “Because Eretz Yisrael is saturated with the quality of “faith.” In the Holy Land we are most connected to Hashem. It was in this Land that our forefathers lived their lives and prophesied. In a word, the Land contains intrinsic holiness.

The following chassidic parable poignantly expresses the idea of simple faith: The first Rebbe of Ger, *Chiddushei HaRim* (1799-1866) shared the following story with Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa (1765-1827): An important official in the government who owned a very expensive and most valuable horse assigned a well-trained guard to keep a watch both day and night over his prized possession. One afternoon he was called to a series of meetings in another city. He arrived late in the afternoon and was forced to leave the horse with a guard that he did not know. He was concerned that if these meetings would go late into the night that guard might fall asleep on the job; he therefore told the guard that he must think about engaging and intriguing matters so that he would not doze off.

After his first meeting ended, he quickly

ran outside to check on his horse and the guard. He asked the guard, “What have you been thinking about?”. The guard answered, “I have been contemplating the question - ‘When one hammers a nail into a piece of wood, where does the wood go when it makes room for the nail?’” The government official was pleased to see that he was following his advice. An hour passed and the official came out again to check on the horse. He again asked the guard, “What are you pondering?” He answered. “When one eats a bagel, where does the hole in the bagel disappear?” “Wonderful, said the official, “keep up the good work.” It was now a few hours later, much deeper into the night as the last meetings came to a close. The official came out. He happily took note of the guard deep in thought. He asked him what he was now thinking about. He answered, “I am speculating over the following: How is it possible that a horse which was tied up, with a guard standing on duty, and yet, the horse has disappeared?

The *Chidushei HaRim* explained his parable’s teaching: When a person is engaged in extended analysis and scrutinization, the *Yetzar Hara* can suddenly come and steal from a person their straightforward thinking and natural and pure beliefs. (*Iturrei Torah, Devarim*, p. 123)

It is striking that the essential trait of *temimut* is given exquisite prominence in the life of the very first Jew. Hashem directs Avraham Avinu to pursue the path of wholehearted righteousness. Namely, “Walk before me, and be *tamim*”

(Bereshit 17:1).

Rashi interpretes “walk before me” and *v’heyei tamim*; as two district directives:

‘Walk before me: “As the Targum interpests it: “serve me”, cling to my worship.

V’heyei tamim - this, too, is a command, pursuant to the previous command: be *wholehearted* throughout all the tests which I will give you.”

The trait of *Temimut*, according to Rashi, consists of the exalted quality of one accepting the difficult decrees even when one’s faith and trust in the Almighty is tested.

Rabbi Moshe Wienberger *shlit”a*, the Rav of “Aish Kodesh Congregation” in Woodmere, NY shared the story of a chassidic Jew in Bnei Brak who lost everything during World War II and was spiritually broken. One day he came to pour his heart out to Rav Menachem Man Shach (1899-2001), the great Lithuanian Rosh Yeshiva (who represented quite a different approach from a Chassidic Rebbe).

The Jew told Rav Shach everything that had befallen him and his family. Rav Shach understood full well the pain of this broken Chassidic man. The man said, “I simply cannot even pray anymore.”

Rav Shach asked him, “What Chassidic group do you belong to?” The man told him, and Rav Shach began to hum a *niggun*, a tune, from that sect of Chassidim. The Chassid closed his eyes and hummed the *niggun* together with Rav Shach, until he started to cry.

Rav Shach said, “For a Chassid, it’s not enough to sing a *niggun*. We have to dance.” So Rav Shach got up and danced with this Jew, round and round.

The end of the story goes that this Jew returned to Shul and began to pray again.

Rabbi Weinberger commented, “Rav Shach did not give him a theological explanation about where God was during the Holocaust. On the contrary Rav Shach was convinced that this *niggun* was still inside that Jew, merely hidden underneath the ashes of Auschwitz. At the depth of one’s heart and soul, the trait of *temimut* is never extinguished. (*Song of Teshuva*, Vol. 1. Rav Moshe Weinberger p.110)

Chassidut offers a unique prescriptive regarding the notion of *temimut*, ‘simple faith’. The Masters emphasized that this *mida* is readily available to each of us. *Temimut* is actually an innate gift of God; it is a natural and organic bond with which we experience our Maker. Simplicity of faith and closeness to Hashem is a quality that has actually been placed within the soul. Each and every *neschama* insistently yearns to tap into its actual source of life, namely the Almighty Himself. May we actualize this yearning and thereby feel a true sense... of spiritual ease, tranquility, and joy. ■

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