

1. “Hasidic pilgrims at Ukraine border refuse to return despite Israel’s plea,” Times of Israel

KYIV, Ukraine — Hundreds of Hasidic Jews were still massed at Ukraine’s border Thursday, with some saying they had no intention of leaving, even though Kyiv has refused their entry, citing coronavirus, and Israel has urged them to return.

Tens of thousands of Hasidic Jews head to the central Ukrainian city of Uman every Jewish New Year — which falls on September 18-20 this year — to visit the tomb of Rabbi Nachman, the founder of the Bratslav Hasidic movement.

The believers departed for Uman this year even though both the Ukrainian and Israeli governments last month had urged them not to travel because of the pandemic.

Speaking to AFP from the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, one of ultra-Orthodox pilgrims, Itsik Cohen, said the believers were hoping for divine intervention.

“I’m waiting and praying that they open the borders, so we can have the privilege of being with our Rabbi, G-d willing,” said Cohen, an Israeli Bratslav Hasid from Jerusalem.

“We believe in G-d, and if G-d wants it this way, we need to do anything we can to show our determination, to the very last minute.”

Ukrainian authorities said the situation had not changed since Monday when crowds of believers began building up on the closed Ukraine border and pilgrims were still refusing to leave.

2. Vayikra 10:1-1 (Judaica Press translation)

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אַהֲרֹן, נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא, אִישׁ מִחֶמְתוֹ, וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ, וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת; וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה--אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם: וַתִּצָּא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם; וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.

And Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the Lord foreign fire, which He had not commanded them. And fire went forth from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

3. Rashi to Vayikra 10:2 (chabad.org translation)

ר' אליעזר אומר לא מתו בני אהרן אלא על ידי שֶהִזְרוּ הֶלְכָה בְּפָנָי מִשָּׁה רַבָּן, רַבִּי לְשִׁמְעָאֵל אוֹמֵר שְׂתוּיֵי יַיִן נִכְנְסוּ לְמִקְדָּשׁ, תַּדַּע, שְׂאֵחָר מִיִּתְּתֵן הַזֹּהֵר הַנּוֹתְרִים שְׁלֹא יִכְנָסוּ שְׂתוּיֵי יַיִן לְמִקְדָּשׁ.

Rabbi Eliezer says: Aaron’s sons died only because **they rendered halachic decisions in the presence of Moses**, their teacher. Rabbi Ishmael says: [They died because] **they had entered the sanctuary after having drunk wine**. The proof is that after their death, [Scripture] admonished the survivors that they may not enter the sanctuary after having drunk wine.

4. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likkutei Moharan 41 (VBM translation)

אָבֵל מִי שְׂמֵרָקֵד *בְּהִתְלַהֲבוֹת הַיִּצְרָר*, זֶה נִקְרָא חֲטָא שֶׁל נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא, שְׂכָתוֹב בָּהֶם (וַיִּקְרָא י':א): וַיִּקְרִיבוּ אֵשׁ זָרָה. נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא הֵם נִצָּח הַהוֹד, וְהִתְלַהֲבוֹת שְׂבִקְדָּשָׁה נִקְרָא יַיִן הַמְּשַׂמֵּם, שְׁעַל־יָדוֹ נִמְתְּקִים הַבְּכוֹרוֹת. וְאֵשׁ זָרָה, נִקְרָא יַיִן הַמְּשַׁפֵּר, הִתְלַהֲבוֹת הַיִּצְרָר. וְשֵׁם יֵשׁ, חַס וְשְׁלוֹם, אֲחִיזָה לְהַחֲיוֹנִים, אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אוֹתָם.

But one who dances with the ***excitement of the yetzer [ha-ra]***, this is called the sin of Nadav and Avihu, about which it is written: "And they offered strange fire" (*Vayikra* 10:1). Nadav and Avihu are *netzach* and *hod*. Excitement in holiness is called wine that gladdens, through which the firstborns are sweetened. And a strange fire is called wine that intoxicates, the excitement of the *yetzer*. There is, G-d forbid, room for the **externals to take hold, which He did not command**.

5. Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, Sfat Emet, Shemini 5636 (VBM translation)

בשם אמו"ז ז"ל ע"פ אשר לא צוה אותם. ללמוד כי העיקר כח כל מעשה האדם מצד ציווי ה'. כי כל שכל אדם בטל לכח זה. והנה נדב ואביהוא היו *צדיקים גדולים ועשו לשם שמים* רק שהי' חסר הציווי.

In the name of my revered grandfather, of blessed memory, on the verse, "which He commanded them not." This teaches that **the primary force of every human action is the Divine command**. For all of human reason is nullified by this force. Now Nadav and Avihu were ***exceedingly righteous men and they acted for the sake of heaven***; but the **command was missing**.

6. Vayikra 9:5-6 (Judaica Press translation)

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה אֶל־פְּנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּקְרְבוּ כָּל־הָעֵדָה וַיַּעֲמְדוּ לִפְנֵי ה': וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה ה' מַעֲשׂוּ וַיִּגְרָא אֲלֵיכֶם כְּכֹד ה'.

And they took what Moses had commanded, to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the entire community approached and stood before the Lord. And Moses said, "This is the thing the Lord has commanded; do [it], and the glory of the Lord will appear to you."

7. Sifra, Parshat Shemini (Silverstein translation)

אמר להם משה לישראל אותו יצר הרע העבירו מלבכם ותהיו כולכם ביראה אחת ובעצה אחת לשרת לפני המקום.

That yetzer hara (for idolatry) — remove it from your heart, and let all of you be of one fear and of one counsel — to minister before the Lord.

8. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, HaEmek Davar to Vayikra 9:6

בשביל זה אמר משה לישראל כי לא כן הדבר. אלא אותו *יצה"ר* העבירו מלבכם שגם זה התשוקה *אע"ג שהיא להשיג אהבת ה' בקדושה* מכ"מ אם היא לא בדרך שעלה על רצונו ית' אינו אלא דרך יצה"ר להטעות ולהתעות דעת גדולי ישראל בזו התשוקה. ואמר להם משה טעם לדבר ותהיו כולכם ביראה אחת ובעצה אחת לשרת לפני המקום.

9. Rabbis Aryeh and Dov Frimer, "Women's Prayer Services – Theory and Practice I," Tradition 32:2, Winter 1998, p. 41

R. Soloveitchik believed he had good reason to doubt that greater fulfillment of mitzvot motivated many of these women, as illustrated in the following story, related to us by R. Yehuda Kelemer, former Rabbi of the Young Israel of Brookline, Massachusetts. During the mid-1970's, one of R. Kelemer's woman congregants at the Young Israel of Brookline was interested in wearing a tallit and tsitsit during the prayer services. After R. Kelemer had expressed to her his hesitations about the matter, she approached R. Soloveitchik — who lived in Brookline — on the matter. The Rav explained that in light of the novelty of the action, it needed to be adopted gradually. Accordingly, he suggested that she first try wearing a tallit without tsitsit (which is, of course, allowed for women.) The Rav asked the woman to return to him after three months, at which time they would discuss the matter further. When the two met once again, she described to R. Soloveitchik the magnificent nature of her religious experience in wearing the tallit. The Rav pointed out to the woman that wearing a tallit without tsitsit lacked any halakhically authentic element of mitzvah. It was obvious, therefore, that what generated her sense of "religious high" was not an enhanced kiyum hamitsvah, but something else. Under such circumstances, the Rav maintained, wearing a tallit was an inappropriate use of the mitzvah. Consequently, the Rav forbade the woman from wearing a tallit with tsitsit.

10. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:1 (Wikisource translation)

יתגבר כארי לעמוד בבוקר לעבודת בוראו שיהא הוא מעורר השחר.

One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator, so that it is he who awakens the dawn.

11. Mishnah Berurah 1:1 (Sefaria Community translation)

לעבודת בוראו — כי לכך נברא האדם, כמו שאמר הכתוב: "כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו" וגו'. ואף אם ישיאנו יצרו בחורף לומר: איך תעמוד בבוקר, כי הקור גדול; או ישיאנו בקיץ לומר: איך תעמוד ממיטתך, ועדיין לא שבעת משנתך? יתגבר עליו ואל ישמע לו, ויחשוב בנפשו: אילו היה נצרך לעמוד לשרת לפני מלך בשך ודם, כמה היה זיהר וזריז לעמוד בהשכמה להכין עצמו לעבודתו; כל שכן וקל וחומר בן בנו של קל וחומר לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא.

In order to serve his Creator - because for this was man created. As the text says "Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory..." And even if his Evil Inclination advises him in the winter and says 'How will you arise in the morning, because it is very cold?' or in the summer advises and says 'How will you arise from your bed, when you still have not slept to your satisfaction?' Overcome him and do not listen to him, and think to yourself: If I had needed to arise to appear before a king of flesh and blood, how carefully and zealously would I arise and awaken in order to prepare myself for this service? All the more so and obviously, before the King of kings the Holy One blessed is He.

12. Berachot 6b (Koren translation)

לְמַעַל [לְבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת] — מִצְוָה לְמַרְהֵט, שְׁנֵאָמַר: "נִרְדָּפָה לְדַעַת אֶת ה'". אָמַר רַבִּי זֵירָא: מְרִישׁ כִּי הִנֵּה חֲזוּיָא לְהוּ לְרַבְנָן דְּקָא רְהֵטֵי לְפָרְקָא בְּשַׁבְּתָא, אָמִינָא: "קָא מְסַלִּין רַבְנָן שַׁבְּתָא". כִּינֵן דְּשִׁמְעֵנָא לְקָא דְרַבִּי תַנְחֻמוֹס אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לׁוּי: לְעוֹלָם יְרוּץ אָדָם לְדַבֵּר הֶלְכָה וְאֶפִּילוּ בְּשַׁבְּתָא, שְׁנֵאָמַר: "אֶחָרֵי ה' יִלְכוּ כְּאֶרְיָה יִשְׂאָג" וְגו', אָנָּא נְמִי רַהִיטְנָא.

With regard to entering a synagogue, it is a mitzvah to run, as it is said: "And let us know, **eagerly strive to know the Lord**" (Hosea 6:3). One who eagerly enters a synagogue displays his enthusiasm to follow the path of G-d...**Rabbi Zeira said: Initially, when I saw the Sages running to the Rabbi's lecture on Shabbat, I said: These Sages are desecrating Shabbat.** One is prohibited from running on Shabbat in deference to the sanctity of the day. **Once I heard that which Rabbi Tanhum said that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: One should always run for a matter of halakha, even on Shabbat, as it is stated: "They shall walk after the Lord, who will roar like a lion"** (Hosea 11:10). In other words, one should rush as though he were chased by a lion; **I too run.**

13. Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, Orchos Yosher (ArtScroll translation), p. 369

...You should know that it is not sufficient to merely *perform* the mitzvah...The basis upon which all of this depends is that when someone does a mitzvah, he should not view it as a heavy burden that he is in a rush to remove from his back. Rather, he should imagine that by doing this mitzvah he is earning a million gold coins. He should be elated when performing the mitzvah with unlimited joy in his heart and soul, and with great enthusiasm, as if they were actually handing him a million gold coins right now for fulfilling this mitzvah.

This is the profound secret of the verse (*Devarim 28:47*): *Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with gladness and goodness of heart.* This is the underlying interpretation of the story of Rav Beruna, who, on the day that he prayed [*Shemoneh Esrei*] immediately after the *berachah* of redemption, did not stop smiling the entire day. This [smile] illustrated that his belief and trust in Hashem was so extreme that the joy of the mitzvah was greater than if an immense reward was actually placed before him.

14. Musings of an Anonymous Rabbi

I hope the chassidim make it to Uman this year. I really do.

I hope they have their minyanim, as usual, with convenient accommodations and pleasant flights.

But if not, then perhaps it's a time for a long-overdue conversation and it starts with looking inward, at our shuls and schedules.

I'm a rabbi at a fairly large, fairly relevant congregation, one with a busy office, active website, and many member families.

And over the years, we've "lost" many of our core members to Rosh Hashanah in Uman. Other colleagues in the rabbinate have experienced the same phenomenon, and it begs a question. And the question is on us.

The veteran Breslover chassidim, those whose fathers and grandfathers went or dreamed of going to Uman — of course that's where they belong.

Those who've become close to Breslov through the seforim, who maintain a serious learning seder in Likutei Moharan and try to live with Breslover minhagim all year long — in tefillah, in simchah, in emunah — that's where they belong as well.

But let's be honest. So many of the tens of thousands who make the pilgrimage are Breslov only in regard to the Uman experience: That's where it starts and ends. No doubt, the inspiration is real; and no doubt, the tzaddik's zechus opens up gates of prayer for them. I understand why they go back. My question is why they had to go in the first place, if they really have no connection to Breslov during the three hundred and sixty-two days a year?

I know the answer. The answer is it's our fault.

They wanted connection and we gave them sound bites about politics. They wanted chizuk and we gave them lectures. They wanted someone to talk up to them and we talked down. They wanted to sing and we told them to listen to the chazzan.

Now, we have another chance.

Even if Uman happens, many of the ones who were going simply to "rebel" against the standard, same-old, unemotional davening will stay home. It's not yet certain what we'll be able to provide this year, if our shuls will be open — and if yes, indoors or outdoors? In small groups or together?

But whatever the case, we will have learned our lesson and try to bring in some of the fire of Uman. More talk about Hashem and less about politics. More honesty and genuineness. We will sing and sing again, stripping away the embarrassment until every child in shul is singing out loud. Rather than hiring pedigreed chazzanim, we will make sure that every person who stands by the amud is worthy, and when they cry, the tzibbur will cry along, because it's for real.

Whatever happens this Rosh Hashanah, give us a chance to try again.

It's what Rebbe Nachman taught, right? There's always another chance."