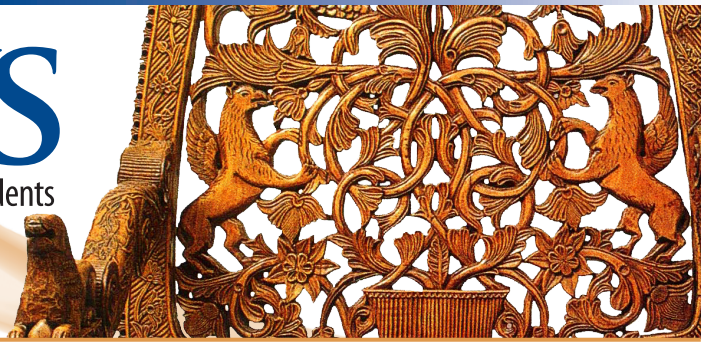


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## What's Your Story?

By Ozer Bergman

“Therefore the Jews ... make the 14th of Adar a day of merriment and drinking” (Esther 9:17). “These days of Purim are mentioned ...” (ibid., 9:28). How are they mentioned? By reading Megillat Esther (Rashi).

As promised, this week we will look at the remaining two mitzvahs of Purim – reading the Megillah and drinking to the point of intoxication – to see what “be happy for life” lessons we can learn from them.

Ask your average male Orthodox Jew what he likes best about Purim, and he'll answer with a smile, “Getting drunk.” Sadly, most of us male Orthodox Jews get it wrong. I don't mean that we drink J&B instead of a designer Scotch (or wine). I mean that we don't think beforehand, “What's the point of this mitzvah? How am I supposed to do it so that God is honored and I become a better Jew?”

The idea is *not* to drink yourself into oblivion (a dubious prospect, at best) or to forget your troubles (which is not the same as solving them or even coming to terms with them). Even drinking in order to be happy for happiness' sake is not the highest aspiration we can have. The Talmud tells us that one is supposed to drink “until you don't know the difference between ‘Cursed is Haman’ and ‘Blessed is Mordekhai’” (Megillah 7b). “Cursed is Haman” means “things are *really* bad” in your life. “Blessed is Mordekhai” means the opposite: things are going really, really well. The most common reactions to “Cursed is Haman” are: “Darn. Shucks. Aw, shoot.” That's not the portrait of a very happy person.

“Blessed is Mordekhai” has a person smiling, whistling and wishing everyone “all the best.” That's the kind of attitude we want to cultivate, and it's clearly opposite “Cursed is Haman.” So how drunk do you have to get to not know the difference between them? You have to get drunk enough to realize that you don't know – that you can't label – your situation. In our ordinary state of mind, circumstances look one way or the other. The Purim-drunk state of mind is to let us in on the secret: we really *don't know*.

It looks good that Mordekhai becomes prime minister after saving Jewish lives. But it has its downside (ibid., 16b). It looks bad that Haman is the prime minister, that Queen Esther is inviting him for cocktails. But that somehow worked out

really, really well. Drink l'chaim, till you know that you don't know how things will turn out, that “Cursed is Haman” and “Blessed is Mordekhai” are both expressions of God's loving care that will result – someday, somehow – in a very happy ending for the Jews.

This curious holiday (“Jews are *commanded* to get drunk?”) has some curious laws about the mitzvah of Megillah-reading. Megillat Esther calls itself an *igeret*, or letter. This requires that we read it not like a scroll, as we do the Torah (at its weekly reading), but as a letter, unfolded and opened. The lesson here is: Don't read Megillat Esther as a “scroll,” a text book. Read it as a “letter” – a personal, private communication written and addressed specifically to you.

Reading the Megillah is one of two mitzvahs that we do twice in the same day. The Talmud tells us that a person is obligated to read it at night and to “repeat” it again during the day (ibid., 4a). We learn from this how to look at life. Even though we just read it last night, and this morning it's the same story in the same words, it's bound to be a different story. Reading it at night—when we don't see or understand—leads us to one set of ideas and conclusions. When we read/view it “in the light of day” we arrive at distinct attitudes and inferences.\* The daytime reading is the primary one. We need to see our stories – our lives – as bright, hopeful, offering a sunny future. Amen!

\* Not unlike the other “double” mitzvah, reciting the Shema.

Based on *Likutey Halachot P'ru u'R'vu* 3:8

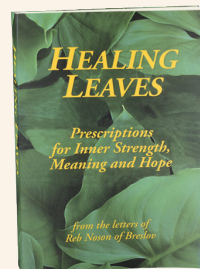
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

A Freilekhen Purim! Purim Samei'ach! Merry Purim!

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



The purpose for which each of us was created is to know God. The main reason why a person comes into this world is to overcome barriers and to come up against doors of bronze and bars of iron in his search for God. The only way to break through them is with will and longing and intense desire. (Letter #110)

# Is God Really Listening?

by Yossi Katz

One of the most interesting and “colorful” customs in Judaism is the stamping and general noisemaking that goes on while the name of Haman, Amalek’s great-grandson, is mentioned during the Megillah reading. In this week’s *Maftir*, we also read about the mitzvah of wiping out Amalek. Who is Haman-Amalek, and how do we wipe him out in the 21st century?

Reb Noson clearly identifies today’s spiritual Amalek in this teaching:

Haman represents the evil that seeks to overpower the Jews at the end of the Babylonian exile in order to postpone the redemption. He seeks to weaken Jewish hearts from praying to God, while claiming that the promised time for redemption has already passed and the Jews are still in exile. Our Sages explain that even Daniel thought he had properly calculated the time of redemption and was mistaken. So Haman took advantage of this opportunity, declaring all hope to be lost.

Haman proclaimed that the Jewish God was asleep, and

*Our prayer is only as strong as  
our faith in it.*

made himself into a new, all-powerful idol, symbolizing the opposite of faith and prayer. The resulting lack of faith and prayer that he generated is the reason for the war that we must fight against Amalek in every generation, and the cause of our prolonged exile to this day.

In reality, God hears every single prayer and it only seems as if He is sleeping. Our misdeeds stir up judgments against the Jewish people and cause God to hide Himself. It is our job to “wake Him up,” so to speak, by arousing His compassion through our prayers and cries.

If Amalek has the power to make us feel as if God isn’t listening, then the solution is: a) to remember all the miracles that were done for the Jewish people throughout the ages and our miraculous survival, and b) to remember our own personal salvations that have come about through our prayers. Our prayer is only as strong as our faith in it. Until we have prayed for something and been answered, we cannot properly believe in the power of prayer. But once we have been answered, we need only remind ourselves of the awesome nature of prayer and Amalek will be defeated.

Amalek is out to weaken our hearts at the end of the exile, when the redemption is just waiting to happen. All we need is a few more prayers in order to awaken God’s compassion, and He will turn to us face to face.

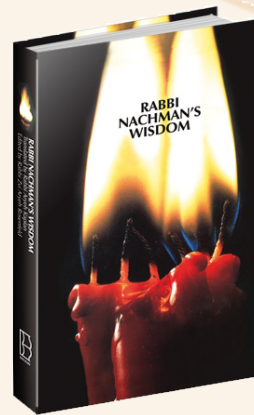
May these last prayers be said quickly and in our times! Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Nachalot 4*

## SIDEPATH

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

13. There are many religious people who have no livelihood and find this to be a source of great stress and confusion. But even this is good for the world. And know that there are many precious words that come only from such confusion.



There are many types of confusion and distraction. In the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabbah* 44:19), we find that there is slumber pertaining to prophecy, as when “a deep sleep fell upon Abraham” (Genesis 15:12). On the other hand, there is the sleep of fools. In both cases, “sleep” refers to mental confusion.

14. I envy a sincerely religious Jew, such as we call an *ehrlukher Yid* (literally, “an honorable Jew”). He may appear to have guts and limbs like everyone else, but he is really something more. A sincerely religious man is very precious indeed.



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641  
P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*