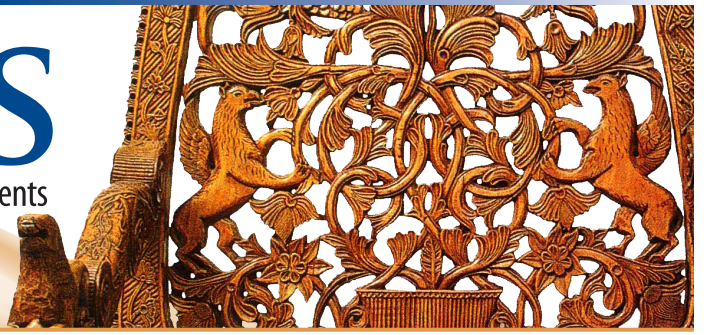


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Freedom For All

By Yossi Katz

“**THE LAND OF** the free and the home of the brave.” If I wouldn’t know that these words were part of the national anthem, I might think they were sung at the Pesach Seder! After all, on Pesach we celebrate our freedom from servitude – something only achieved by acting brave and courageous.

Our ancestors in Egypt didn’t have it easy. Forced to do backbreaking labor, men were also made to do women’s work and women to do jobs typically performed by men. They were physically abused, deprived of sleep and proper nutrition, and never given a moment’s rest. But these deplorable physical conditions only paralleled the state of their psychological and spiritual strain. Stripped of their personal lives, without a moment to think and make sense of their situation, they were mentally overwhelmed. No doubt, this also influenced their descent to the 49th level of impurity.

But then, miracle of miracles, at their lowest point – where they were but a hairsbreadth from falling to the 50th level of impurity, from which it would have been impossible to return – they were redeemed with great signs and wonders.

This is not only the story of our ancestors. It is the story of every one of us each year during Pesach. We arrive at the Seder table with our own parcel of problems and stresses. We have work-related difficulties, issues with our relationships and marriages, health concerns, and so on. These “burdens” and their harsh daily toll overwhelm us and force us into spiritual slumber. We don’t even realize that we’re asleep, for we have descended. But then we gather together and begin to tell of our Exodus from *MitZRayiM* (Egypt) – this is also our exit from *MetZaRiM*, the “straits” and pressures of our daily lives.

As we read the words of the Haggadah and perform the mitzvot of Pesach, a Heavenly light shines down on us and infuses our souls with great spiritual yearning. We

may not always merit seeing this light, but our souls are touched by it. We have been freed and now we must run!

The Jews didn’t have time to prepare for their exodus, and neither do we. The freedom of Pesach isn’t something that we initiate and work towards, but a flash miracle that we cannot truly absorb. Now is not the time to begin understanding and explaining all the things that were holding us back. Now is the time to move forward, to begin getting used to living like free men.

Reb Noson teaches that there is but a small difference between *ChaMetZ* (leavening) and *MatZaH* – the difference between the Hebrew letters *chet* (in *chametz*) and *heh* (in *matzah*). The letter *chet* is fully enclosed; according to the Kabbalah, it represents *chokhmah* (wisdom). Like a person who thinks he knows everything and can answer every question, even a minuscule amount of this type of wisdom/leavening is what the Torah prohibits on Pesach. The letter *heh*, in contrast, has a small opening and is comprised of the letters *yod* and *dalet*. The *yod* also represents wisdom, but the *dalet* refers to faith. A person who combines faith with wisdom leaves an “opening”: he remains humble while utilizing whatever knowledge he has to further his relationship and faith in God.

This is the secret of true freedom. God is ready and waiting to take us out, but will we let Him in? The choice is ours. We can use our wisdom and knowledge to think that we know it all and can save ourselves ... or we can stop trying to figure everything out and admit that we don’t have the answers to every question, embarking upon a life of turning to God and trusting that He will lead us. Personal freedom comes when we use our intellect to strengthen our faith in God, rather than letting it enslave us in self-delusion.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Giluach 3
Pesach kasher v’samei’ach!
A happy and kosher Passover to all!*

Respect for All

By Chaim Kramer

DURING THE YEARS of persecution that Reb Noson and his followers endured, Reb Noson's opponents in the town of Breslov arranged for the local authorities to set up a boot factory to supply an army unit stationed nearby. The site they chose for the factory was Reb Noson's house. In the weeks before Pesach, a group of non-Jewish workers converted the main room into a workshop, filling it with foul-smelling hides. There they worked and ate their meals, while Reb Noson's family was restricted to the bedrooms.

On the evening before Pesach, the time came for *bedikat chametz*, the search for bread and other leavened products that might still be found in the house. But the non-Jewish workers were still at work and their food was still on the premises. Reb Noson recited the blessing over the search with his usual intensity, having in mind this time that just as the *chametz* must be removed, so should the boot factory.

The workers were so awed by Reb Noson's blessing that they told him to search wherever he wanted and not think of them at all. By then, the few Breslovers with influence in the town had convinced the authorities to remove the boot factory from Reb Noson's home. The following day at noon, the workers removed their hides and equipment and left. Immediately, a few people were hired to clean the house and get it ready for Pesach.

That night during the Seder, Reb Noson recited the Haggadah with great fervor. When the meal was served, his family started talking about their sufferings and how happy they were to be rid of the boot factory. Then they spoke against their opponents. This upset Reb Noson. He said, "This is such a great and awesome time. After all the effort every Jew has put into his Pesach preparations, after all the money we have spent to honor Pesach, after all our longing to perform the mitzvot of Pesach, it is absolutely forbidden to talk against them. They are our brothers. Eventually they will receive their *tikkun*. We ourselves will seek remedies for them!"

After the meal, Reb Noson completed the Seder with a deeply inspiring melody.

*Based on Alim LiTerufah,
Tovot Zikhronot and Yemey HaTlaot*

SIDEPATH

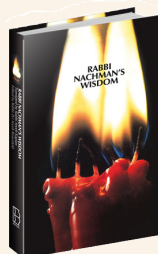
Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

118. Reb Noson writes: I heard that the Rebbe once exclaimed with wonder, "About *God*, people ask many questions?!"

How good it is when you settle your mind to realize that there are no questions. It is written, "For God's ways are straight" (Hosea 14:10). Everything is perfectly in order.

119. I do not recall the exact course of the discussion, but I do remember that the Rebbe ended by saying, "If people would only hold on to *this*" With his gestures, he emphasized how important "this" is —

"this" meaning a person's pleasure in and strong desire for a fellow Jew to succeed and excel in serving God, even if the person himself is unable to, God forbid. This is quite a high level.



[The Rebbe's intent was that there is something to grasp hold of even if you cannot attain a high level yourself. You can still hope that others attain what is beyond your reach.]

I also remember that the Rebbe said, "Even when I am not worthy of serving God, I am satisfied to let another serve Him. This is a very important thing to grasp." I heard this from the Rebbe's own lips.

It seems obvious to me. Even though I may not be worthy, I still long for everyone to be truly righteous. I would like nothing better than for all my friends to be great tzaddikim. This would be my greatest expression of love and friendship.



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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.