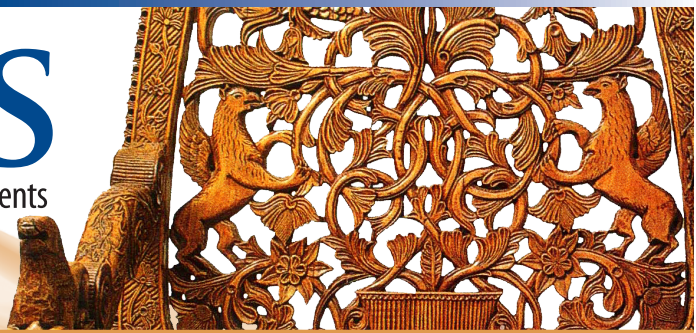


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Mission ~~Impossible~~

By Yossi Katz

IT'S LITERALLY THE world's oldest argument. Before Creation, God consulted with the angels, asking their opinion of His new enterprise. They argued against it: "What is man that You should remember him?" (Psalms 8:5). When God desired to give us His holy Torah, once again the angels countered, "Leave the Torah with us and we will properly honor and cherish it!" (*Shabbat* 88b). Thank goodness, God chose not to side with them then, either.

But why didn't He? Angels are absolute servants of God; they certainly appreciate His greatness and understand the true value of the Torah. This wasn't about selfishly defending their personal honor – it was about wanting to guard and protect matters of eternal loftiness. Hey, just looking at the daily headlines and the general laxity toward Torah values, we can confirm their fears. Wouldn't it have been better for the Torah to remain in the realm of those who are forever holy and uplifted? Why did God allow something so precious to fall into a state of disrespect and permissiveness?

Joseph understood the ways of God. Our *parashah* tells us, "Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings" (Genesis 37:1). In Hebrew, "sojournings" is *meGuRei*, similar to *GeR* (convert). Just like his father, Jacob continued the work of bringing those most distant, close. The Torah continues, "These are the offspring of Jacob – Joseph" (*ibid.*, 2). Joseph was considered the main spiritual child of Jacob; he was the torchbearer who continued the critical work of his father. "And he was childish with the children of Bilhah and the children of Zilpah" (*ibid.*). These children represent the weakest Jews. Bilhah and Zilpah were maidservants, and their descendants were thus considered to be of inferior spiritual quality. Joseph lowered himself to their level in order to raise them and build them up.

However, the same harsh judgment that the angels had passed against God's wish to create man and give him the Torah was lodged against Joseph's idea, too. In a spirit of holiness, Joseph's brothers couldn't understand what he

was doing. They couldn't fathom that he was continuing the true, holy work of their father, and looked down on him for lowering himself to others.

And once again, many years later, this argument repeated itself. The students of Shammai, who was a rigid and exacting teacher, argued that one must light all eight candles of the menorah on the first night of Chanukah and decrease by one candle each subsequent night, until one candle remained at the end. The students of Hillel, who was a very loving and easygoing teacher, countered that one should begin with one candle and add an additional candle each subsequent night, finishing with eight candles on the last night. We follow the opinion of the school of Hillel.

These two schools were not arguing about whether Chanukah was holiest on the first or last night – everyone agreed that the eighth night is holiest. Rather, the students of Shammai sought to protect the tremendous holiness of Chanukah from those who were unworthy. They figured, better to fool and keep away those who are distant, since they are unworthy of this great light anyhow.

The students of Hillel knew better. They taught us that the greater the light, the more potent and powerful, the more it can to descend to even the lowest of levels. Likewise, the greater the Tzaddik, the greater his ability and responsibility to uplift those who are furthest from God. Therefore Joseph HaTzaddik's name was *YoSef* (literally, "he will add"), because he would be *MoSef VeHolekh* (he would add and increase) every day in his efforts to create the vessels and spiritual instruments necessary for every Jew to forge his or her own connection to God.

As we approach the long, frigid Chanukah nights, Joseph teaches us that God always knew that His Torah and its observance would fall to the lowest place. Nevertheless, He left us with great Tzaddikim to teach us that His desire is for us to serve Him precisely from this place. Perhaps the angels thought this was "mission impossible." But the Tzaddikim who bridge Heaven and earth reveal that there is always hope, and that our little flames will one day morph into a blazing fire of closeness to God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hashkamot HaBoker 4

Breaking Cruelty with Compassion

By Yehudis Golshevsky

THE POVERTY OF R' Pinchas Yehoshua of Tcherin is hard for us to grasp. He was so poor, he could only afford to rent a hovel with a dirt floor, and it cost him five rubles a year. One year's rent was so difficult for him that he was forced to put off paying it. The next year brought no relief, and again he deferred payment. After seven years of delaying, his landlord finally had had enough. "You owe me thirty-five rubles for these past seven years. If you don't pay me within the next few weeks, I will evict you!"

Having no choice, R' Pinchas Yehoshua visited R' Abbaleh, a very wealthy man in town who was known to be quite stingy. The poor man walked into R' Abbaleh's resplendent home and crossed through many rooms until he finally reached the inner sanctum. He poured out his tale of woe, whereupon R' Abbaleh gave him a donation of five rubles. "You can collect the rest from other chassidim," he said gruffly.

R' Pinchas Yehoshua thanked him from the bottom of his heart and took his leave. But as he reached the end of the next room, he heard R' Abbaleh calling him back. "Why don't you take another five rubles? That way, you will have almost a third of the sum you require."

Again R' Pinchas Yehoshua expressed his heartfelt gratitude and exited the room. But he hadn't left the next room before he heard R' Abbaleh's return summons. The wealthy man gave him another five rubles and explained that he now had almost half the required sum. R' Pinchas Yehoshua thanked him sincerely and again set out.

This pattern repeated itself until R' Pinchas Yehosha had received the entire sum he needed.

When the Breslovers heard this story, they were impressed. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender explained, "It is clear that R' Abbaleh had to struggle mightily to give the entire sum. Initially, his mercy was aroused and he gave a little. Then he roused his pity gradually, in stages, until eventually he covered the entire sum. He followed Rebbe Nachman's advice that one breaks his cruelty by transforming it into compassion."

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh V:208

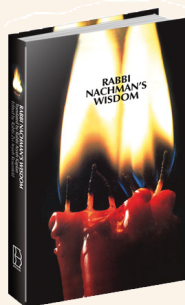
SIDEPATH

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

183. The Rebbe once felt an abdominal pain after being outside. He said, "I feel that I will soon receive money. It is written, 'And your belly's going out shall be like money'" (Isaiah 48:19).

Shortly after this, the Rebbe received money by mail.

184. I heard that the Rebbe once said, "As soon as a man enters and shakes my hand, I know his entire past history."



He said this is alluded to in the verse, "From hand to hand, his evil shall not be cleansed" (Proverbs 11:21).

That is, as soon as one shakes hands with the Rebbe, placing "hand to hand" in greeting, "his evil shall not be cleansed." Everything was immediately revealed to the Rebbe.

I myself also once heard something like this. The Rebbe spoke in an offhand manner, as if it were very easy to know another's past history from beginning to end.

The Rebbe said, "You can do this wisdom alone, without any special degree of spiritual perception. You can grasp much from the way a person speaks. If you know how to look, there are many other signs. You can also recognize a sexually immoral person by his nose. You can tell whether or not a man's faith is pure by his belt. There are many other such signs."

There are many cases in which the Rebbe told people things they had done when they came to him.



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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.