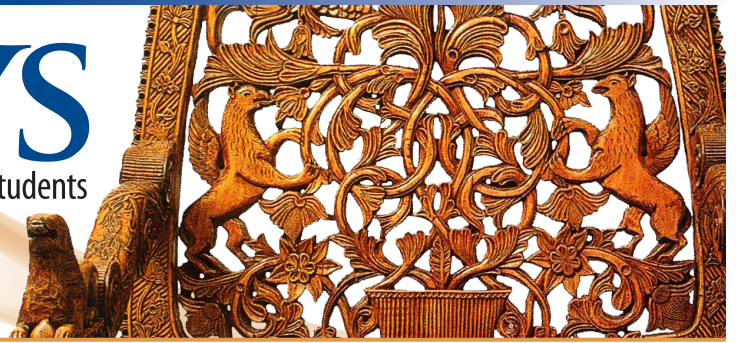


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Striking It Rich

By Yossi Katz

WHAT IF I TOLD you that I know the secret to accumulating wealth? I bet you'd want to be my friend. Doesn't the prospect of gaining this elusive knowledge get you a tad bit excited? But what if I told you that it's available to each of us? Impossible, you might say. But that would be your mistake.

God promised Abraham that his children would descend to Egypt as slaves, but would eventually be redeemed with great wealth. In fact, this week's *parashah* states, "They emptied out Egypt" (Exodus 12:36). Now, don't feel bad for the "poor" Egyptians! Essentially, prosperity was God's way of rewarding His loyal servant, Abraham. But if that was so, why not just straight out bless his children with wealth? Why was it necessary to reward Abraham by first enslaving his descendants?

The key to this riddle is that one cannot become rich unless he is poor first. King David, as the monarch, was obviously fabulously wealthy. Yet he would constantly proclaim, "For I am poor and destitute." Why? Because even the total Tzaddik, the one who is completely righteous in his deeds, can never repay God for all the goodness in his life. Therefore the verse states, "Because regarding mankind, there is no righteous person in the world that does only good without sinning" (Ecclesiastics 7:20). King David understood that no matter how righteous he was, in comparing his actions to the great kindnesses that God had bestowed upon him, he would always fall short. Therefore he saw himself as the poorest and most destitute. Whatever he had was not his; he was eating out of someone else's hand. Where's the pride in that?

What about us simple folk? We are certainly no King David. Should we not feel incredible humility before God, as Job said, "In nakedness I left my mother's womb" (Job 1:21)? Our starting point is the realization of our humble beginnings. We are God's creation; our actions (or inactions) simply cannot begin to repay our awesome debt.

This understanding is truly the greatest blessing. Our Rabbis teach, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with

his portion" (*Pirkey Avot* 4:1). As we develop this attitude, we begin to appreciate everything that we have in our lives and begin to accumulate true wealth.

Someone who is not happy with his portion makes a few bucks and runs to spend his money on status symbols and the latest fads. No matter what he accumulates, his eye is already focused on the next big buy and he's never content with what he has. This can't be considered wealth, because his possessions aren't worth anything to him. But the humble fellow, even when he comes into great riches, never loses his appreciation for the simple things that benefited him until now. His possessions never depreciate, they only yield great profit.

Yes, God could have simply rewarded Abraham by blessing his children with great wealth. But would it have meant anything to them? Would they have appreciated it, or would it have caused them to lust after money and possessions, becoming enslaved to His very blessing? Instead God, in His great kindness, did the complete opposite. He brought about the temporary enslavement of our people, so that we would be able to see things in true perspective. Rather than being drawn after money, we could rise above the temptation of the vanity of wealth and utilize this great blessing to benefit ourselves and others.

The secret to wealth is remembering that we are poor. As long as we remember our heavenly balance, we can adjust our bank accounts down here any which way we like.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhot Megillah 6:11

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV
Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Our days are like a passing shadow and time rushes by. Nothing but the Torah, prayer and good deeds that you manage to seize each day will remain with you. Everything else is fleeting. (*Letter #5*)

Neither Rain, Nor Sleet, Nor Snow...

By Gedaliah Fleer

MANY OF THE BRESLOVER chassidim who lived in Uman in the twentieth century were meticulous about practicing *hitbodedut* in the fields and forests at night, in fulfillment of Rebbe Nachman's advice.

Led by R' Elyakim Getzel, a descendant of Rebbe Nachman, a group of *ovdim* (devotees) would gather at midnight and go down to the river to immerse, breaking the ice to use the river as a *mikvah*. Their greatest worry was finding the hole in the broken ice again in order to re-emerge from the water. They would take along bundles of straw and make fires on the riverbank so they would not freeze when wet. Afterward, they would spend many hours in *hitbodedut* in the forest before returning to town in time for the morning prayers.

One icy night, even colder than the usual sub-zero Ukrainian temperatures, nearly everyone in the group was unwilling to go out to the forest. Only R' Elyakim Getzel and R' Hirsch Leib Lippel ventured forth. With gusting winds piling the snow several feet high, eventually R' Hirsch Leib could no longer keep pace and retreated. R' Elyakim was the only one to forge ahead, performing his devotions alone in the forest (*heard from R' Hirsch Leib Lippel*).

* *

R' "Shabsi" Breslover awoke very early and was one of the first to arrive in synagogue every morning, even in the freezing Ukrainian winters – and even when he was in his mid-eighties!

When asked about it, he said it would certainly be easier for him to stay in bed under the covers in the early morning in such freezing temperatures. "But when I wake up," he explained, "I hear a voice telling me to remain in bed and go back to sleep. I ask myself, 'Who is telling me this? Why, it is my evil inclination!'" Then I reflect, "But he is as old as me, and he's already on the job! So I jump out of bed right away and come to synagogue!" (*Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Rosen*).

From "Against All Odds: The Incredible Story of an American Chassid Who Broke Through the Iron Curtain to Reach Rebbe Nachman's Grave in Uman"

SIDEPATH

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

193. The Rebbe said that one must use the same powers with money as he does with food. (These powers are acceptance, retention, digestion, distribution and expulsion.)



When you eat, you make use of your power of acceptance. You also make use of your power of retention, holding the food so that it does not immediately leave your body. You then use your faculty of digestion and distribution, delivering the food to all parts of the body. The brain receives the choicest parts, with the next best going to the heart. Each part of the

body receives what is best for it. Following this, you make use of your power of expulsion, excreting the unusable portion of the food.

Money requires these same powers. You must use your power of retention and not spend the money immediately. [Not like those who have a great desire for money and spend their lives acquiring it, only to squander it immediately.] Then you must make use of your power of distribution, budgeting your income for all your necessities. The choicest portion must be given to charity. The rest must be distributed properly, just as in the case of food.

194. The Rebbe said: Suffering brings us closer to God. When we lose our health, who is taking it if not God? Therefore we are nearer to Him. When we lose a child, who takes him if not God? If anything, these things bring us even closer to God.



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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.

Dedicated in the Memory (L'Ilui Nishmat) of Yehudis bat Shimon