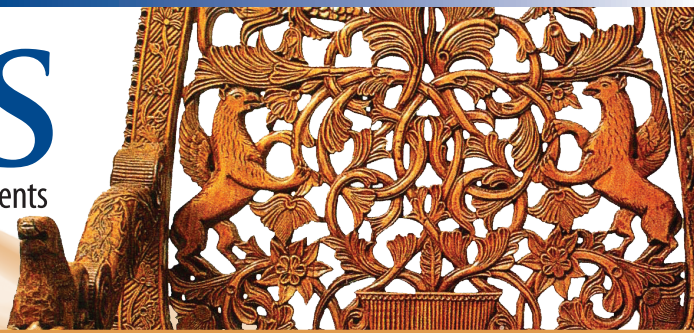


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Behind the Scenes at the Palace

By Yossi Katz

OK, SO WE WERE SPARED. And for over 2,000 years, Jews have celebrated the holiday of Purim. But what's so special about Purim? Haven't we seen innumerable villains rise up against us, trying to destroy our nation? Don't we declare in the Passover Haggadah every year, "In every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand"?

Furthermore, we celebrate Passover because the Jews were freed from bondage and were eventually led to the Holy Land, not to mention receiving the Torah and becoming a nation along the way. After the Purim miracle, the Jews were still stuck in Persia under the evil King Achashveirosh. Isn't this a far cry from the miracles of the Redemption from Egypt, or even the Chanukah story where at least we defeated the enemy and reclaimed our Holy Temple?

The Megillah begins by recounting the incredible wealth and grandeur of Achashveirosh and his royal court. The king hosts a world-class party—celebrating, according to our Sages, the expiry date of the prophecy to redeem the Jews. It's been 70 years since the Holy Temple was destroyed and we went into exile. Achashveirosh wants to drive home the message that God has abandoned us and we should fear only him. Audaciously, he adorns himself in the clothing of the Kohen Gadol at the party.

Haman, the archenemy of the Jews, takes his cue from the king and decides that now is the opportune time to get rid of the Jews once and for all. To accomplish this, he plans to sever our special connection with God by demanding that everyone bow to him and to the idol that he's wearing. "But Mordechai would not kneel or bow" (Esther 3:2).

Mordechai the Tzaddik saw through Achashveirosh's and Haman's plot. He wasn't impressed by their honor and glory, because he knew this was only God's honor

being manifested through them. Mordechai understood that if this was the king of Persia's honor, how much greater is the King of the Universe's honor! So Mordechai feared only God.

"The *pur* (lot) was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month [to select the day to annihilate the Jews]" (ibid. 3:7). The way of Haman, who represents evil, is to "cast" us down with negativity little by little, day by day, month by month, until we have completely fallen away from our special relationship with God. Even today, Haman frightens the exiled Jew by continually sending him negative messages. "Your enemies have destroyed your Temple—give up!"

Mordechai commanded Esther, who represents the Jewish people, to beseech the king. But Esther replied, "I haven't been summoned in 30 days" (ibid. 4:11). She was saying that her relationship with the True King had gotten stale; she didn't feel fit to approach Him anymore. But Mordechai knew that God's love for us is eternal and that Esther had been influenced by Haman's evil mindset. There's no such thing as despair—if we have fallen, we must pick ourselves up again, because there is always hope. Everything can be reversed for the good! So Esther was also able to rise above fear and approach the King.

"And the King extended to Esther the golden scepter" (ibid. 5:2). On that day, God showed us that no matter how far one may fall and no matter what mistakes he's made, He will extend Himself to that person and bring about his ultimate triumph.

This is the true miracle of Purim, which is even greater than the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt. Despite the evil Achashveirosh still being in power, God showed us that there is nothing to fear at all. Whether it is the mightiest monarchs threatening us, or our feelings of distance from God, they are all mere illusions. Through the teachings of the Tzaddikim, we can come to know that all negativity can be elevated and used as a medium to bring us closer to the One Above.

*Based on Hilkhos Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah 4
A Freilichen Purim! Purim Samei'ach!*

Open Hearts, Open Hands

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONE OF THE MAIN *mitzvot* of Purim is *matanos l'evyonim*, giving gifts to the poor. Breslover chassidim would point out that Rebbe Nachman taught that giving charity is an *avodah*, a Divine service, that requires an investment of effort (*Likutey Moharan* II, 4). Charity is the means to open all the doors and channels of blessing, and needs to be undertaken with focused attention. This obviously applies even more on Purim, when we have an obligation to give charity to two deserving parties, even if we don't have many resources of our own.

A certain Breslover chassid was feeling resentful about always being approached to donate to supposedly worthy causes. He asked a friend for advice on how to give charity with an open heart. The friend replied, "Rebbe Nachman explained that whenever something gets you angry, you need to transform your cruelty to compassion. By putting yourself in the position of the poor—really identifying with their pain and struggle—you'll feel real compassion for them. Then you'll want to help them in any way possible."

Reb Mordechai Barbinitzer was a wealthy man who gave large amounts of charity to the poor. Everybody loved him; his heart was wide open to anyone who needed his assistance. Although he was very well-to-do, whenever he arrived in Uman he would not hire a wagon to carry him from the train station to the *kloyz* (the Breslov synagogue), which was quite a distance away. People naturally wondered why he didn't take a wagon as the wealthy usually do.

"If I take a wagon, it will be very difficult for me to empathize with how hard it is for the poor, who have to walk this distance," he explained. "So I walk to see how they feel, and make sure to open my heart and purse to support them."

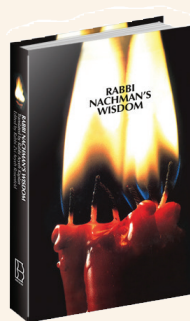
Reb Mordechai owned a factory that manufactured soap. Once, a few drops of a caustic chemical dripped on his hand and he got a nasty burn. He turned to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Bender, who was present at the time, and said, "Look how hard we work, even burning our hands! But we're willing to do all this to earn more and more money, so that we'll be able to provide for the poor!"

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:284, IV:456

SIDEPATH

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

210. The Rebbe said that anything he did in public was very difficult and required genuine self-sacrifice. He told us that before he began the first word of the *Kiddush*, he literally felt as if his soul were about to depart. The same was true when he was ready to begin the first words of a lesson. He said, "*Vie ich vil arois lazen das ershte vort, dacht zich mir at gei ich ois*—When I am ready to express the first word, I feel I am expiring."



211. Some of the Rebbe's enemies spread a rumor that all his teachings were handed down to him by his grandfather, Rabbi Nachman Horodenker. He made a joke of the absurdity of this rumor, saying, "My grandfather must surely have been good to me to have left me lessons befitting each occasion, no matter what happens. They all fit what people need to hear, whether on *Shabbat Chanukah* or *Shabbat*

Nachamu or whatever other time I speak ... I am able to take the lesson and include in it everyone's present needs, both spiritually and materially, as well as current events ..."

We ourselves could see that the Rebbe's lessons contained what each of the listeners needed to hear. His lessons had everything that we needed for both body and soul. Each lesson wove all this in with our present needs and with everything else that was happening in the world.



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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.