

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Land of Desire

By Yossi Katz

WHY ARE THINGS so difficult? Why can't life just be "easy-breezy"? These are normal and essential questions to ask. If we want to be a little more sophisticated, we could add, "if God only wants to make my life better, shouldn't the things I want and desire be so much easier to come by?" Instead, it seems that whenever we want to do the right thing or improve in a certain area, everything is thrown against us at that precise moment.

Before taking us out of Egypt, we were promised that we would be redeemed and brought to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." Gathered near the border of the Land of Israel, moments away from realizing the culmination of our incredible redemptive process, we sent scouts to study the nature of the land and its dwellers.

Initially, they reported back very positive news: "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." But then things took a turn for the ugly: "However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and we even saw the offspring of the giant" (Numbers 13:27-28).

Essentially, they were reporting the truth. On the one hand, the land was exactly as promised; they even brought a large fruit to demonstrate this. But they were also very troubled: If this was the land we were destined to receive, why in the world would God place such tremendous obstacles in our way? For Heaven's sake, there are giants dwelling in the land! How can we ever hope to conquer it? While the scout's face-value observations were on target, they completely misunderstood the true essence of the Land of Israel.

We refer to Israel as *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, but why? We don't say the Land of America or the Land of Japan. There is a good reason for this. The Hebrew word for "land," *eReTz*, comes from the same root as *RaTzon* (desire or will). *Eretz Yisrael* is a source for accessing personal will, desire and passion in life. Both *eReTz* and *RaTzon* come from the root *RaTz* (run). When one merits to attach himself to *Eretz*

Yisrael, his personal willpower can run wild. The sweet fruit of the land that the Torah so praises represents the spiritual love and desire that can be absorbed in this place. However, God first places great obstacles in the way.

The reason for the obstacles is simple. They challenge us to dig deep within ourselves to discover our inner willpower. They force us to realize just how much we want that end goal. Just like a wife who desires that her husband display a vibrant interest in her, God desires an intimate relationship with us. Therefore He gives us various opportunities to demonstrate our profound desire for Him. By cultivating our innermost desire for Him, we nullify ourselves and unite with His Oneness, to the place of the *Raava d'Raavin*, the Will of Wills. Once there, we are naturally infused with an even greater desire for Him.

The Jews stood gazing at the land in the near distance. This was the moment when they could express their deepest yearning to finally realize their dream. The obstacles were meant to push them to turn to God with an awesome, burning hope and desire, so they would become unified with His Will. The land of desire would become the most desired, its spiritual potential fully realized and experienced. But the scouts did not understand this, and were instead overcome by the obstacles.

As we read about this tragedy once again, may we merit to see our own obstacles for what they truly are and express our great yearning that we all return home, to the place of His true desire. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaRei'ach 5

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



The heart of every single person should be enlightened with the knowledge that God is right there beside him. He should know and remember at all times that "the whole world is filled with His glory." (Letter #273)

The Fur Peltz

ONCE THERE WAS a poor chassid who stood in the open marketplace all day long, selling salted fish from a barrel. Naturally, during the long, bitterly cold Ukrainian winters, he needed a warm overcoat. But all he owned was an old fur peltz so tattered and worn that it was virtually useless. Without a winter coat, he would not be able to earn even his customary, meager living. He approached one of the elder chassidim for advice.

“Go to the village of Terhovitza,” the equally impoverished sage told him, “and look for a Breslover chassid named Reb Sender. He will help you.”

The man found a ride to the nearby village and met Reb Sender. A cloth merchant in his youth, Reb Sender had been introduced to Rebbe Nachman’s teachings through several of Reb Noson’s followers while visiting Uman on business many years earlier. Now he was the Rav of the Breslov shul in Terhovitza.

After warmly receiving his guest, Reb Sender asked what had prompted his visit. With great emotion, the unhappy fellow poured forth his plight. “Don’t worry,” Reb Sender said encouragingly. “Everything will be taken care of tonight.”

In the early evening, the Breslov shul filled with men who regularly studied together before reciting the evening prayer. They prayed with the same intensity that one might expect only on Yom Kippur. And the dance that followed lifted its participants far beyond all earthly concerns as their voices joined together in song.

Reb Sender and his fellow chassidim had a most unusual custom. Before the dance, they would put their wallets on the table in the middle of the room. Reb Sender, who was in charge of the congregation’s charity fund, would take whatever was needed for any holy cause that might have been brought to his attention.

This time, Reb Sender took enough money to buy their needy guest a new winter coat and a pair of boots, plus enough cash to help him to invest in a more profitable line of merchandise.

After the grateful chassid had returned home, Reb Sender remarked: “A fur coat has thousands of hairs. But if only one hair from this fellow’s peltz accompanies me when I stand before the Heavenly court, my entire life on earth will have been worthwhile!”

*Based on a story preserved by R’ Yaakov Dov,
Oneg Shabbat, appendix*

SIDEPATH

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

238. The Rebbe said, “When the day begins, I surrender my every movement to God. I ask that every motion I may make be as God would want it. I ask the same for all my children and other dependants. On Shabbat



and festivals, I also surrender the entire day to God, praying that every action be as God’s would want. Then, as things occur that day – or that Shabbat – I am not disturbed that my observance might not be proper.”

239. The Rebbe said, “God’s ways are not like those of man. When a man makes a garment, he values it most when it is brand new. As it becomes worn and damaged, its value is reduced. But God began by creating an imperfect world. As it is constantly being improved, it becomes more precious to God. In each generation, tzaddikim enhance God’s work. In the end, the Mashiach will come and the task will be completed.”

240. The Rebbe was once speaking to one of his followers who was a teacher. The Rebbe asked him, “How much do you earn each term?” The man specified the amount. The Rebbe calculated how much it came out for each day and showed that it was a very small sum.

The Rebbe said, “If this is the case, figure how much you earn each hour. It is a mere trifle. You are being taken away from your own studies and losing your future reward for a mere gulden or two.”



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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.