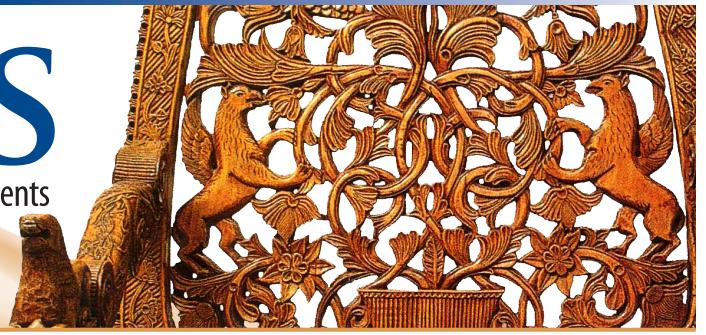


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Mashiach Within Us

By Yossi Katz

I HAVE ALWAYS been intrigued by the dramatic meeting of the two leaders of Israel, Judah and Joseph, that takes place at the beginning of our *parashah*. The Torah states, “Then Judah approached him [Joseph]” (Genesis 44:18). This historic event foreshadows the future Messianic era, when the Jewish People will be led first by Mashiach, the son of Joseph, and then by Mashiach, the son of David (Judah’s descendant).

This week’s *Haftarah* also forecasts this future event. The Jewish People are described as being in a state of physical and spiritual exile, but eventually will be wholly redeemed. “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his companions, and I will place them with him with the stick of Judah, and I will make them into one stick. ... I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land. ... And they shall no longer defile themselves with their idols, with their detestable things, or with all their transgressions. ... And My servant David shall be king over them, and one shepherd shall be for them all, and they shall walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and perform them” (Ezekiel 37:19-24).

Our current exile is referred to as “Esau’s Exile.” Esau and his anti-spiritual cohorts seek to impress on us that our existence is entirely superficial and sensual, that life is nothing more than a series of randomly unfolding events. Accordingly, our purpose is to grab hold of whatever temporary pleasure we can. This attitude buries us by distancing us from God and any kind of deeper meaning. Ours is a habitual, meaningless existence – aka true exile!

The origins of exile and redemption can be traced back to Jacob. The Midrash states, “Jacob saw all the chieftains of Esau and wondered, ‘Who can capture all

of them?’ It is therefore written, ‘These are the offspring of Jacob – Joseph’ (Genesis 37:2). As it is written, ‘The house of Jacob shall be fire, and house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau straw (Ovadia 1:18). A spark goes forth from Joseph that destroys and consumes all of them.’”

Joseph is the dormant Jewish spark residing quietly within each of us. It was Pharaoh who said about him, “Can you find one like this in whom there is such a spirit?” When this Jewish spark is ignited, a tremendous spiritual fire bursts forth. The warmth of these flames invigorates our lives with joy and meaning. Their light engulfs and dispels the darkness and sadness that surround us, so that no external barrier can stand in our way. This potential lies within us, but how do we access it?

This spark ignites each time Judah approaches Joseph and their awesome spiritual powers are consolidated. After Judah’s birth, his mother Leah declared, “This time, I will thank God” (Genesis 29:35). Judah symbolizes our ability to recognize God and express thankfulness to Him. Only by proclaiming our gratitude and appreciation for God’s faithfulness can we access our flaming, hidden spirit.

Judah therefore said to Joseph, “Let your servant say something into my master’s ears, and let not your wrath be kindled against your servant” (ibid. 44:18). Our ears are the pathways to our heart. By verbalizing before God our awareness of His being connected to our every thought and breath, we can melt the bitterness of the anger that covers over our hearts and lives.

God’s goodness permeates every aspect of creation and our every experience. When we look for God’s kindness even in the bleakest of times, and thank Him for it, we unite Judah with Joseph and are worthy of great redemption even in the thick of exile. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkat Hoda’ah 6

Begin with Prayer!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

“HAD I ONLY known the power of prayer, I never would have tortured my body so much.”

This was Rebbe Nachman’s conclusion after years of fasting and devotions. Had he only realized early in life that everything he yearned to achieve could have been accomplished through prayer, he wouldn’t have damaged his health with physically demanding trials.

He would also say, “From the least of us to the greatest of us, it is impossible to be a truly worthy Jew except through *hitbodedut*—through personal prayer in one’s own words. That means setting aside a particular space and time to pour out one’s heart before God as one would do with his very best friend.”

And then Rebbe Nachman would list tzaddik after tzaddik, emphasizing that each one of them reached his lofty level only through prayer and *hitbodedut*. And as for himself? “*Gohr mein zach iz tefillah!* – My way is all about prayer!” This became the solid practice of his followers, to turn in prayer to God at all times, in all ways, about every single matter.

Once a Jew came to Rebbe Nachman and revealed his innermost yearning to the tzaddik. “Rebbe, I want so badly to come close to God!”

Rebbe Nachman said to him, “Then my advice is that you should turn to Torah study, because it is known to be the way to draw closer to God.”

The poor man let out a heartbreaking sigh. “But Rebbe, I don’t know how to learn at all! It breaks my heart, but I’m so far from being a scholar.”

Rebbe Nachman answered encouragingly, “If so, then the best advice is to pray! Through prayer, it is possible to reach every goal! It is the pathway to Torah, to devotion, to holiness. Begin with prayer!”

The Rebbe carried out this practice constantly, in secret...in hidden attics, in the quiet of the forests, in the privacy of his own bedchamber, on the river in a little rowboat. He spoke his own words and also made use of every book of prayers he could find, even the little volumes of Yiddish prayers that had been written for women. In Rebbe Nachman’s eyes, if it was a prayer, nothing could be better.

SIDEPATH

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

299. It was my custom to see the Rebbe every year after Simchat Torah. He would always ask me if I truly rejoiced on the festival. Many times, he told me how the community celebrated in his house and how much pleasure he derived from their joy.

Once in the middle of the year the Rebbe spoke to me about Simchat Torah. He asked me, “Do you now feel joy in your heart? Do you feel this happiness at least once a year?”



The Rebbe very much wanted us to be joyous all year round, particularly on Simchat Torah, Purim, Shabbat and festivals. The Rebbe told me that once on Simchat Torah, he was so overjoyed that he danced all by himself in his room.

300. The Rebbe once told me, “Everything you see in the world – everything that exists – is all for the sake of free will, in order to test people.”

301. I heard in the Rebbe’s name: A Jew’s main devotion in the winter is to wake up at midnight [and say *Tikkun Chatzot*, the midnight lament]. In the summer, when the nights are very short [and so awakening at midnight is not practiced in the Diaspora], one should still be careful to wake up at the crack of dawn.

302. I was once standing before the Rebbe as he lay in his bed. Suddenly, these words flew out of his holy mouth: “The crucial thing is: ‘From the belly of hell I cried out!’” (Jonah 2:3).



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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.