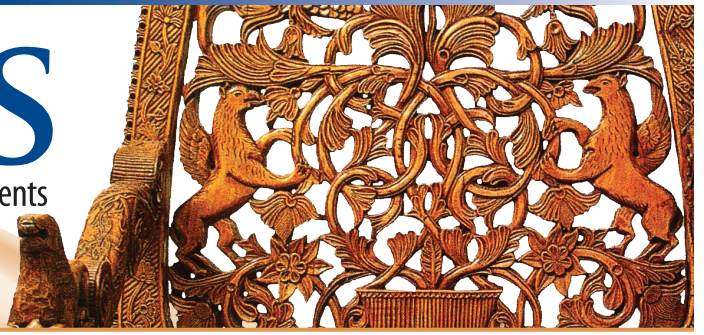


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT KI TISA • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 19

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One Good Eye

By Yossi Katz

IT WAS FINALLY Friday afternoon, almost time for Shabbat and some long overdue rest. Jerry had returned from a long overseas business trip and hadn't been at his familiar seat in shul for several weeks. As the men filed in for the *Minchah* service, Jerry was greeted by the Rabbi with a hearty "*Shalom Aleichem*."

Jerry tried to pray properly but his mind wasn't at ease, there was just so much catching up to do. He pictured all the places he had been to and the people he had met. Before he knew it, he was taking three steps back as he completed the *Amidah* prayer. Once again, Jerry heard the Rabbi wishing him, "*Shalom Aleichem*."

"Huh?" Jerry thought to himself, staring at the Rabbi. The Rabbi whispered, "True, I welcomed you back from your first overseas trip, but I wanted to welcome you back from this last trip as well!"

We often live our lives subconsciously feeling, "I am the ultimate example of a religious hypocrite." We think, "Maybe I prayed with some intensity and concentration this morning, but already this afternoon my mind was wandering and distant from the words of the siddur." Or, "I may have seen the good points in my friend, spouse or business associate yesterday, but today they couldn't do anything right. I am back to being such a negative person."

We quickly become convinced that we haven't made any progress, and that whatever measure of good we thought we'd accomplished is either nonexistent or wiped out by now. But is this true? We have all been taught that two wrongs don't make a right, but what about the opposite? Am I erasing the good deed I've done by later doing something that implies the opposite? If my future behavior isn't at the higher

standard of my earlier actions, does that mean I was insincere and have only been deluding myself until now?

Well, thankfully, God already answered this question for us! Jewish sources teach that the entire creation and history of civilization was only a prelude for the most important event ever. This event was so great that it was actually the *raison d'être* for everything that came before it. This event was the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

One could assume that the Jewish People had to be spiritually worthy in order to receive this ultimate gift. Certainly they had to be completely sincere and dedicated to following what was written in the Torah. And yet God says about the Jewish People at Sinai, "You have captured My heart with *one* of your eyes" (Song of Songs 4:9). Why only one? Because the other eye was already looking at the Golden Calf, waiting for the moment it could be worshipped! (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:55).

Surely there couldn't be a greater hypocrisy than this. At the very giving of the Torah, there were elements of our nation who already had their eye on defiling all that was written. As our Sages teach, "Idol worship is equivalent to transgressing the entire Torah" (*Shevuot* 29a). And yet God was drawn toward us because of our one good eye!

Good is true and eternal. Nothing I do will ever negate the value and absolute purity of a good deed, thought or desire. Every bit of good that I do is forever cherished by God and safeguarded for my eternal reward. Now is not the time to despair, but to strengthen myself and start again, because whatever good I do from now on remains with me always!

Based on Sichot HaRan (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom) #123

In This World & the Next

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB SHIMON B' REB BER, who met Rebbe Nachman on the day of the Rebbe's wedding, was Rebbe Nachman's very first disciple. Reb Shimon proved to be a faithful devotee and *shamash* (personal assistant) throughout the Rebbe's years as a leader and teacher. One question was always on his lips: "Will I merit to be your *shamash* in the next world, too?" Rebbe Nachman never gave him a clear answer, though.

Once Reb Shimon appealed yet again to Rebbe Nachman for assurance that he would be worthy of attending him in the World to Come. He reminded his mentor of one of the best examples of the extent of his self-sacrifice on Rebbe Nachman's behalf:

It happened when the two were traveling in a horse-drawn carriage with a number of other passengers. As the carriage began to descend downhill, one of the wheels broke away. Not only did the carriage begin to race uncontrollably, but the road itself was filled with obstacles and boulders. The danger grew from instant to instant and all of the passengers were in danger of their lives.

Without a thought for his own safety, Reb Shimon jumped out of the carriage and flung himself against the side of the vehicle. Using his own body as a support in place of the missing wheel, he raced with the carriage downhill to keep it from overturning.

"Rebbe, did I not save your life that time in the carriage? Is that not enough to guarantee me a place by your side in the next world?"

Rebbe Nachman smiled and nodded. "You're right—that time, you really did well!" This was the Rebbe's way of acknowledging the debt of gratitude that he owed his student. Nonetheless, he didn't promise that Reb Shimon's request would be granted.

Soon afterward Reb Shimon appeared again before Rebbe Nachman with his usual refrain, and this time the Rebbe didn't refuse him.

"Since I saw you last, my righteous mother appeared to me in a dream and she took me to task for not agreeing to your request," the Rebbe told him. "So I promise you that you will indeed be my *shamash* in both this world and the next."

Rabbi Nachman of Tulchin, Reb Noson's great student, would add, "And even Reb Noson was jealous of Reb Shimon for having received that kind of a promise from Rebbe Nachman!"

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 123-125

SIDEPATH

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

308 (continued). Even pagan philosophers realized that the world is filled with suffering, and discussed it often in their works. They came to the conclusion that the only solution is stoic forbearance.

No one can endure this world and not be overcome by its suffering. Only the Torah can provide this strength.

If you really think things out, you will realize that this world in itself has absolutely no purpose. Imagine a world filled with good and riches. Imagine a world in which there was no pain, suffering or worry. It would still be empty and devoid of all purpose. For time passes like the blink of an eye, and life is over.



If even a perfect world would itself be purposeless, what shall we say about the world in which we live? It is filled with pain, sorrow and suffering without end. Every person's life is filled with worries about finances and concerns, troubles and problems – from the greatest to the smallest, from the richest of the rich to the poorest of the poor. Everyone is trapped by his limitations. The greatest emperors and kings are filled with worries and fears without measure.

The only way out is to choose the Torah and its commandments. Make up your mind to be satisfied with an absolute minimum in order to immerse yourself in the Torah.



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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.