

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Greatest Miracle

By Yossi Katz

**PURIM IS THE** greatest Jewish holiday! How do I know? The Kabbalah says that Yom Kippur, or as it's sometimes spelled out in full, *Yom HaKiPURIM* can be read as “the day that is like Purim” (*Tikkuney Zohar* #57b) The Midrash explains, “Even though all other holidays will be annulled in the future with the coming of Mashiach, the days of Purim will never disappear” (*Midrash Mishlei* 9:2).

How do we understand this? On Yom Kippur, we dress in white and fast and pray in the synagogue all day, resembling the exalted level of the angels. But on Purim, not only is work permissible, but we spend a good part of the day enjoying lavish meals and even drinking to the point of drunkenness. Some angels! Furthermore, if on all the other festivals we say Hallel in gratitude to God, why on such a special day like Purim do we not recite Hallel?

The Talmud answers that on Pesach, we became free men, but on Purim we remained enslaved to King Achashveirosh (*Megillah* 14a). Only a free man can say Hallel. The Talmud adds that since we are already reading the Megillah, it serves in lieu of Hallel. These answers are seemingly contradictory opinions, as one implies that it really is fitting to say Hallel, but we already read the Megillah instead, and the other disagrees with that. However, according to the pro-Hallel view, why does the Megillah which is read in lieu of Hallel describe in such vivid detail the exaltedness of Achashveirosh's kingdom and recount the lavishness of his party celebrating the unfulfilled prophecy of our redemption (see *Megillat Esther*, chapter 1)? If the reading of the Megillah is in lieu of Hallel, why read so much into the greatness of the very person whom we remained enslaved to? According to the other opinion, it was precisely because we were still enslaved to him

that we don't say Hallel on Purim in the first place!

Purim took place after the Holy Temple was destroyed and the prophecy of our redemption seemed to be unfulfilled. Precisely then, Achashveirosh made his party and invited the Jews for a specific purpose. His goal was to push us down so much that we would even stoop to eating at the party that celebrated our demise as the God's special people. Achashveirosh wanted us to accept him as the ultimate power and authority behind everything in our lives. Likewise, Haman made the Jews bow down to him and the idol that he wore. He sought to tear us away from our belief in Divine Providence and subjugate us to foreign fears and beliefs.

This is the power of Amalek (the ancestor of Haman). Amalek scares us into believing in all our problems, fears and anxieties, because we are not worthy of God's attention and blessing. Likewise, our prayers are in vain and our mitzvos worthless.

But Esther approached the King (aka God) “without permission” (*ibid.* 4:16). Although Esther knew she was not worthy of approaching God and serving as the agent to save the Jewish nation, she would still try. For God's compassion never ceases and He will never desert His People.

This is the greatest of all miracles. There are no differing opinions in the Talmud; each opinion complements the other. Even when we are at our lowest state, subjugated to the rulership of the powerful evil king that the Megillah describes in such detail, God's providence never leaves our side. We may not say Hallel because we are slaves to a foreign master, but the reading of the Megillah reveals an even greater miracle: that even in this state, God never forsakes us. Though He may seem hidden, if we turn to Him, He will reveal that He has been present all along.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Bechor Beheimah Tehorah 4*

# A Mother's Prayer

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE REB SHIMON learned an important lesson about the power of simple prayer from his Rebbe. When his young son fell dangerously ill, Reb Shimon ran to the Rebbe, begging him to pray for the boy's recovery. But Rebbe Nachman didn't answer...he just stood there, silent. Reb Shimon returned home to attend to his ailing child.

That night, the boy reached a crisis—he was literally struggling for his life. His distraught parents could do nothing to help him. At that moment, Reb Shimon's wife stood up and called out to Heaven, "Master of the universe! Father! My Father in Heaven! See my pain, see the child's suffering! Have mercy on us and heal him!"

The next day at dawn, Reb Shimon knocked at Rebbe Nachman's door again, asking him to pray for the child.

Rebbe Nachman ran to the door to greet him. "See the greatness of a simple prayer and how powerful it is!" the Rebbe cried. "The child's life was already over by Heavenly decree, yet your wife's fervent prayer drew down a complete recovery for your son! And not only that, but she managed to draw down for him many good years. He's going to live a good, long life!"

Indeed, the child recovered completely, and lived to the age of nearly one hundred!

Reb Shimon himself lived a long life as well, finishing out his years in the holy city of Tzefat. At a certain point, he had to return to Europe to arrange a match for one of his sons. He arrived in Ukraine not long before Shavuot, and naturally traveled to Breslov to spend the festival with his fellow chassidim.

Reb Shimon had been Rebbe Nachman's first and oldest follower, but when he saw Reb Noson essentially leading the new and long-time chassidim, he was amazed by Reb Noson's purity and holiness. He exclaimed, "I thought that Reb Noson was only a student of Rebbe Nachman, but now I see that he is really a rebbe in his own right! And I should know, because I set aside all of the tzaddikim of my time and attached myself to a young boy before he was even married. I know a tzaddik when I see one!"

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 127-128, 136-137*

## SIDEPATH

**Advice (Likutei Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum**

**TRUTH AND FAITH.** 1. In essence, redemption is dependent on faith. The root cause of the exile is simply a lack of faith (*Likutey Moharan* 7:1).

2. Faith, prayer, miracles and the Land of Israel are all one concept. They are all dependent on each other (*ibid.*).

3. There are people who attempt to give natural explanations for all the miracles that take place. They are atheists who have no faith in miracles. When all such people have disappeared and faith will have spread throughout the world, then the Mashiach will come. Because the redemption depends on faith (*ibid.*).

4. The only way to attain faith is through truth. Faith is applicable only in the case of something that cannot be understood rationally. Where one can understand something rationally, there is no question of faith being involved at all. But there are certain things that can never be understood rationally. ... If you will only search for the truth with complete honesty, you will eventually realize that you must have faith in God, in the true Tzaddikim and in the holy Torah. You will realize this despite the fact that such faith is not something that is susceptible to our rational understanding, bound as our rational faculties are by the material nature of our existence. If you think about things with uncompromising honesty, you will get a glimmer of understanding that this really is the truth. Reason will not help here. You need faith that is strong and complete (*ibid.* 7:2).



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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.*