

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Peace of Amalek

By Yossi Katz

A FRIEND ONCE told me about a frightening incident. He was swimming at a beach in Israel and all of a sudden felt himself being pulled by an undertow. For several minutes he fought back and treaded water with all his might. He swung his legs and arms back and forth while doing his absolute best to keep his head above water. Finally he had no more strength; he couldn't fight any longer. So he gave up. Remarkably, he recounted that this was the most peaceful moment of his life. He had accepted that he was going to drown and was incredibly relieved to not have to struggle any more.

There are two types of peace in life: a real peace and a false peace. A real peace is when we try our best, understand our limitations, and hope for a better future, while not looking negatively at our current situation. This type of peace is praiseworthy and essential for spiritual growth. But there is another peace. Let's call it the peace of Amalek.

Amalek is our greatest spiritual threat. Interestingly, he does not attack us head-on because he knows that won't work. We are not called a "stiff-necked people" for nothing. Just like during the civil rights movement, the anti-apartheid movement and many others, Jews have never tired of standing up for what they believe in. Instead, the Torah reveals Amalek's battle plan: "He cooled you off by cutting down all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18). This plan is so dangerous that we are implored, "You shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!" (ibid. 25:19).

Every chain is only as strong as its weakest link. If our spirituality could be likened to a rope connecting us to God, Amalek is the force that attacks precisely at the most threadbare spot. Just as he attacked the stragglers at the rear who were faint and weary, and just as his

descendent Haman attacked the Jewish People when the prophecy of our redemption had seemingly expired, so too, he attacks each one of us at precisely calculated moments.

Have you ever made an effort to improve something in your life, perhaps an important relationship with a child or spouse, or a specific character trait like anger or self-control? Initially you invest tremendous energy and effort, but soon enough things take a turn and you feel yourself sliding backwards. You become filled with anxiety and worry; you second-guess your own abilities and sincerity. Perhaps you redouble your efforts, but a short time later, again things aren't going the way you imagined they would. Like my friend treading water, eventually you take a deep breath and say to yourself, "I've had enough of this already." You accept your limitations and once again feel at peace. Welcome to Amalek's peace!

Negative emotions associated with fear, like worry and anxiety, are not bad. Without them, we would walk around without awareness and waste our lives engaged in destructive behaviors. It's our negative perception of these emotions that is flawed. Amalek uses our negativity against us: "Give up trying already, this is obviously not for you!" We then fall into a spiritual and mental slumber.

God is the source of everything and, just like in Megillah, all of history is following a script that will lead to a happy ending. The Megillah story reveals that as bad as things seem now, the difficulties are really paving the way for our eventual salvation. Like Esther who tried to execute an impossible plan in the most precarious of situations, it's our job to never give up trying. Purim teaches us to transform our fear to joy because we know that every counterforce will ultimately propel us forward. I know that even if I fall back, I need to keep my head above water, because this experience itself is conditioning me for greatness.

Now that is something to dance about!

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

Dance of Salvation

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MEIR TEPLIKER, a close disciple of Reb Noson, had a student who lived in a remote village. Each year, Breslovers from the surrounding area would gather in Teplik at Reb Meir's home for Purim day. Reb Meir would prepare a festive meal that started around noon. He would close his blinds and fill the room with candles so their intimate light would enhance the joy of the gathering.

One Purim, during the height of the dancing, Reb Meir noticed one of his students standing on the side looking distraught.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You don't have anything blocking your *simchah*, but how can I rejoice when my daughters, especially Tzivia, my eldest, are all unmarried and I can't possibly afford their dowry?" the man cried.

Reb Meir exclaimed, "You can't find a better strategy to improve your situation than feeling depressed on Purim?" He grabbed his student and gave him a big hug. "If you are suffering so much, you need to cry out to God again and again: 'My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!'"

Reb Meir drew his student into the circle of joyous, drunken dancers and the man shouted with his entire being, "My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!" Reb Meir pressed him, "If things are so bad, one cries out to God like this again and again!" They danced this way, with the student crying out and praying, and Reb Meir encouraging him to keep at it, for a long time.

A few days after Purim, another Breslover came to the student's village for a few days and naturally lodged with his friend. On Shabbat he realized that Tzivia, his friend's eldest daughter, was particularly modest and had a sterling character. He was so taken with her that the size of her dowry was the furthest thing from his mind. "You know, I have a son around your daughter's age," he told his friend. "Maybe we should make a match between them?"

After getting the approval of Reb Meir Tepliker, that is exactly what happened. Everyone saw that by overcoming his sadness to rejoice on Purim and throwing himself into prayer, Reb Meir's student had brought about his own salvation.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI, 59

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

TRUTH AND FAITH. 5. The only way to find truth is to draw closer to the Tzaddikim and follow their guidance. Do not turn aside from their words to the left or the right. Then the truth will be engraved within you and you will achieve genuine faith. By the same token, keep well away from bad influences. Pay no attention to the suggestions of those who raise every kind of question about the truth.

You can succeed in this through observing the mitzvah of tzitzit. Tzitzit are a hedge against immorality, which is



one of the strongest forces that can undermine truth. The guidance and advice of worthless people actually breeds immorality. By observing the mitzvah of tzitzit, you will be able to purify yourself and observe the covenant, which is the foundation of faith (*Likutey Moharan I, 7:3*).

6. Pray with strength and put all your force into the letters of the prayers. Through this, you attain faith (*ibid. 9:1*).

7. People who deny that miracles are possible and claim everything that takes place has a natural explanation can actually witness a miracle and still explain it away. Naturally, this attitude of mind is very damaging to religious faith. It is harmful to prayer, and people's understanding of the true significance of the Land of Israel becomes obscured. All this contributes to the lengthening of the exile (*ibid. 9:2*).



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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.