

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Real Happiness

By Yossi Katz

WHAT WOULD LIFE be like if everything was just fun and games? Many dream about such an existence. The drudgeries of a day job, the responsibilities of raising a family and the endless tasks at home make the easy life sound so appealing. But would throwing away all of life's difficulties and just having fun be so great after all?

Rebbe Nachman famously taught that it is a great mitzvah to always be happy. Curiously, the Rebbe explained that sometimes it's not enough to just act in a joyful manner and let sorrow or anxiety melt away on their own. Sometimes one must forcefully transform pain and sorrow into joy and happiness (*Likutey Moharan* II, 23). The reason for this is that there are elements of pain and sorrow that refuse to become a platform for holiness. When we have a good time and act joyfully, these elements refuse to take a permanent leave. They later return to haunt us, never allowing us to reach an optimal level of happiness.

A great example of living with permanent spiritual bliss is Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's two sons who served as *Kohanim* in the Tabernacle. They chose not to marry because the thought of dealing with all the mundane aspects of married life did not appeal to them. They preferred to live a worry-free spiritual existence. But they met their match when they were unable to perform an essential part of the Tabernacle service, the bringing of the *ketoret* (incense-offering).

The *ketoret* was a mixture of eleven spices that was offered up to God. It had two distinct features. First, one of its ingredients was galbanum, something that is terribly foul-smelling. Second, offering the *ketoret* was the single greatest way to uplift the holy sparks from the lowest of places on earth. These two features are very much connected. The *ketoret* embodies the idea of transforming pain and sorrow into joy and happiness. The foul-smelling galbanum represents the

sorrow found in the lowly places in this world. When included together with the other spices, its foul odor is transformed to create a "heavenly aroma."

However, Nadav and Avihu had never married. Happy as they were with their spiritual existence, when they released the foul odor of galbanum, they lacked the tools to deal with this challenge. Pain and sorrow are an extension of death and bereavement, which is why these emotions are experienced at those times. The sorrow of the galbanum overcame Nadav and Avihu to the point of death.

How can we force the elements of sorrow to be elevated to the point of holiness and joy? We can turn them on their head by recognizing that if I feel sad right now because of my lowliness, then shouldn't I be happy that even a "lowlife" like myself can accomplish some measure of goodness?! For example, if I am sad because I feel far from God, isn't it amazing that God must love me so much that He still helps me do many mitzvot like giving *tzedakah*, wearing *tzitzit*, saying Psalms, and many more!

Rebbe Nachman was once speaking with someone who complained bitterly about his terrible behavior. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days turned into years and the man grew dejected. The Rebbe said, "Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad." At this the man got excited and exclaimed, "But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew!"

The Rebbe knew that the only way to restore this Jew's spirit was by helping him feel that if the argument of the sorrow was really true, then he finally possessed enough perspective to appreciate his good points in contrast to his destitute spiritual stature. When we, too, come to this recognition, there is hope indeed.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Piryah VeRivyah 3

Look Up!

ONE OF THE Rebbe's followers, Reb Chaikel, had a relative who was extremely poor. Once, while traveling with Rebbe Nachman, Reb Chaikel instructed the wagon driver to stop at this relative's house. Inside, Reb Chaikel pointed out the man's poverty and asked the Rebbe to give him a blessing for wealth.

The Rebbe said to Reb Chaikel, "I have no blessings for him. If you want him to have a blessing, you give it."

After making certain that he'd heard correctly, and obtaining the Rebbe's assurances that he wouldn't mind his "presumptuousness," Reb Chaikel emptied a pitcher of water across the floor. Then he spread the water in all directions, saying, "Abundance to the east, abundance to the west, north and south!" Then Rebbe Nachman and Reb Chaikel left.

Shortly afterward, a group of merchants came to this man's home seeking to purchase food and drink. When the man told them that he had none, they gave him money to buy it for them. From then on, whenever these merchants came to the area, they would lodge at the man's house, and they eventually commissioned him to sell their wares for them. Before long, the man prospered and became very wealthy.

Before, whenever he came to Breslov, this man had always made certain to visit the Rebbe. But now, the more he prospered, the more engrossed he became in his business dealings. He no longer had the time to visit the Rebbe.

Once, while rushing around Breslov on business, he passed by the Rebbe's house. Rebbe Nachman saw him and called him in. "Did you glance at the sky today?" the Rebbe asked him. The man replied that he hadn't. Calling him to the window, the Rebbe said, "Tell me what you see." "I see wagons and horses and people scurrying about," the man replied.

"Believe me," Rebbe Nachman said, "fifty years from now there will be other market days. There will be other horses, other wagons, different people. What is here today will no longer be. I ask you, what pressure are you under? What's making you so busy that you don't even have time to look at Heaven?"

Based on Kokhavy Or #5, p. 41

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

TRUTH AND FAITH. 8. The less faith there is, the more the face of God is concealed and the more fiercely His anger burns. At such times, the Tzaddikim shy away from accepting positions of authority and honor, and the world is left without true leadership. But if people learn to hold their anger in check and to break the force of anger by showing love instead, then God's own anger will be sweetened. The true Tzaddikim will again be willing to accept roles of leadership and honor, and the world will be ready for the true leader who has the



power to bring each person to his own complete fulfillment (*Likutey Moharan I*, 18:2).

9. Nobody should accept a position of leadership and authority unless he has attained the ultimate level of faith. There are people who believe in God but still have a trace of superstition within them. People like this should never become leaders. Then there are those who pride themselves on their devotion to the good of the world. They claim that this is their motive for seeking power. But really they are interested in the prestige. The devotion they claim to have is simply a rationalization. When people like this gain power, it can result in a terrible godlessness, the negation of faith. But Heaven takes pity on the world and these people are deprived of the reins of power (*ibid.* 18:3).



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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.