

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Fighting is Not a Mitzvah

By Yossi Katz

WE HEAR ABOUT it all the time: fighting, arguing, accusing and judging, all supposedly for the sake of Heaven. The excuse is always the same: “Doesn’t it say in the Torah, ‘You shall reprove your brother and not bear a sin because of him’?” (Leviticus 19:17). “Aren’t we obligated to give Mussar?” This is what all our “caring and sincere rabble-rousers” claim!

Today, the old shteibel coffee room chatter has been technologically upgraded. Bloggers and online whistleblowers can post their opinions and so-called reproofs and, within seconds, their often ignorant and destructive comments make their way around the world, being seen by many thousands of people. The amount of damage caused by this is colossal.

This commandment is perhaps the greatest opportunity for our evil inclination to take advantage of a positive mitzvah and use it as a catalyst for sin. It convinces us, “Didn’t he or she do such and such? Surely they should be severely criticized, chastised and possibly even publicly humiliated!” “It’s my obligation on behalf of God Himself!” This mistake is so grave that otherwise well-intentioned people can completely destroy the lives of so many.

No one is perfect and we all have personal shortcomings. But the Torah commands us to look for the good that we also abundantly possess, and judge our fellow Jew positively. If we are to play the part of God, working on judging others (and ourselves) positively must be our top priority.

Yet what about the times that the *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) specifies that we do acknowledge that our fellow Jew has done something wrong? Rabbi Akiva declared in the times of the Talmud, “I doubt there is anyone in this generation who is capable of giving rebuke!” (*Erkhein* 16b; see *Ein Yaakov*). Rashi

explains that the lesson is to never rebuke someone by embarrassing him publicly.

The Talmud further states that if there is a question of rebuking for the sake of Heaven or abstaining because of false humility, it is better to abstain (*ibid.*). Rashi explains that the Talmud is saying it is better to refrain from publicly rebuking an individual even if only because one feels a false sense of humility (i.e. that he isn’t on a high enough level) than to rebuke even for the sake of Heaven!

Is this not so much more true so in our times? Would not Rabbi Akiva have made his statement so much more emphatically?

There is a tremendous mitzvah to speak pleasantly to our friend’s heart and encourage him along the way; our *parashah* commands us to do so. That being said, we must be vigilant to never publicly humiliate anyone, cause embarrassment or, God forbid, resort to fighting, arguments and accusations. Anyone – even rabbis – who stir up arguments and fights are making a terrible mistake and we should stay far away from these elements.

Additionally, Rebbe Nachman once pointed out the example of moving around a foul-smelling object. As long as the object rests in its place, its smell is more or less minimized. However, as soon as one moves the object around, the smell intensifies tremendously. We must be very careful when dealing with our own shortcomings and those of others. Often our main ability is to see the good in others and concentrate on valuing it and judging them positively by it. In this way, we can influence them positively while steering clear of further damage.

The Torah has commanded us to observe the 613 mitzvot. These 613 do not include ANY mitzvah of fighting. May we begin to work on properly keeping these 613 and not on adding any of our own creations.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Yayin Nesach 4

Spiritual Healing

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN SAID, “My daughters were blessed with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) that verges on prophecy. But of my daughter Sarah, I don’t speak at all!”

Sarah, affectionately known as Sorke, was the apple of Rebbe Nachman’s eye. She wasn’t a confidante like Odel; she was someone altogether different. We still have the text of two letters that her father sent to her, and stand amazed at the language he used in his opening salutation:

“My daughter and beloved friend, modest and wise, praiseworthy and upright, *Maras* [an honorific like Madam] Sarah, may she live long.”

In one of Rebbe Nachman’s letters to his *mechutan* (Sarah’s father-in-law), he begged, “Please take good care of my daughter’s health, because my soul is bound up with hers.” On another occasion, Rebbe Nachman wrote to Sarah and said that he would be happier if she and her husband would move closer to him so that she could take her meals together with him and share her wisdom and fear of God. The letter was flowing with her praises, but after she finished reading it, Sarah broke down in tears.

The chassidim who were with her at the time were in a state of shock at her response, as she cried, “Don’t you see? My father thinks that I’m in such a low state that he needs to praise me to lift up my spirits!”

After her marriage, Sarah moved to her husband’s town of Kremenchug, where she suffered from ill health and chronic pain. Rebbe Nachman was deeply concerned with her welfare at all times, and had occasion to visit her or to receive her in turn. Once, when she suffered from terrible tooth pain, Rebbe Nachman told her that she must put herself in a state of joy to heal herself.

“But how can I rejoice when I’m suffering?” she asked.

Rebbe Nachman answered, “You start with make-believe joy: you force yourself. But you’ll find that your make-believe joy will transform into true joy. And when your feet lift up to dance all by themselves, your pain will leave you and you’ll be healed!”

Sarah followed her father’s advice. Some time later that day, the chassidim saw that she had drawn the curtains in her house so that she could dance freely without being seen...and her toothache did, in fact, disappear!

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 186-196

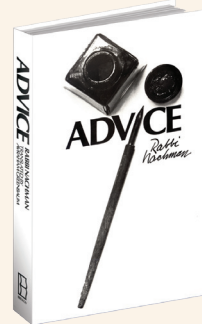
SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

TRUTH AND FAITH. 25. The gates of holiness are opened through faith (*Likutey Moharan I, 57:8*).

26. We speak of faith only when the one who believes does not know why he believes. But even so, for the believer himself the thing he believes is perfectly clear and obvious to him – as if he saw it with his own eyes. This is because his faith is so strong (*ibid. I, 62:5*).

27. One of the ways to develop faith is by drawing those who are far from God closer (*ibid. I, 62:3-5*).



28. When people lack absolute faith, they can fall into the trap of confusing the means with the ultimate cause. For example, they believe that their livelihood is totally dependent on their business activities – as if without them God would have no other means of

providing them with their sustenance. Or they may believe that it is the medicine that causes the cure, as if without it God would have no other means of sending healing. Then they become preoccupied with the means – chasing after the right medicaments, throwing themselves into their work, and so on – and forget to turn to God, the ultimate cause. We do have to concern ourselves with the means, but we must not make the mistake of putting our faith in the intermediary. We must have faith in God alone (*ibid. I, 62:6*).



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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.

Dedicated in the Memory of (L’Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon