

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Home for God

By Yossi Katz

WHAT IF THE Nine Days could be an exciting time of year? I don't mean a time of partying and celebration, but more along the lines of a meaningful time that we feel grateful for having experienced.

Not only does this opportunity exist, but this was certainly the intent of our Sages when they established the laws and customs of this period. Real Judaism is never about cultural or historical practices, and it's certainly not about imposing archaic, difficult and meaningless restrictions on us. This time period is no different, and in our fast-paced, ADD world, it behooves us to slow down and discover the many essential parts of lives that can be accessed only through the lessons of these more somber days.

Every person has his home or base where people get to know and experience him. For example, a boss has his office and a Rabbi has his study. Without limiting themselves to specific places, it wouldn't be possible to create the relationships they desire. Similarly, a husband and wife live together in their home or apartment; this is an environment where they get to know each other in the most intimate way.

The *Beit HaMidash* (Holy Temple) literally means "the sanctified house." It was a house for God, the one place on earth where God's Presence would rest among us and create the optimal environment for spiritual development and experience on Earth.

But let's take a step back. The idea of God, the Infinite and most Awesome Being, constricting His Presence and clothing His Majesty in an earthly house is difficult to understand. He is so incredible great, why would He limit, so to speak, His Presence to this one place?

As this election cycle has once again vividly demonstrated, politicians cannot get elected without convincing (and sometimes begging) people to vote them for them. Similarly, a king can't exist without a people. In an incredible display of humbleness, God desired to bestow His Kingship upon us. In order to effectuate this act,

He requires our acknowledgement and loyalty to Him. Nevertheless, out of His incredible love for us, He desired to do such and therefore constricted His Presence by clothing His majesty in the Beit HaMikdash so that we may know Him and become His intimate People.

Unfortunately, as time went on, we lost our sense of appreciation for this unique opportunity. This can be seen by the misdeeds our Prophets and Sages spell out, one of which was that we did not make the blessings on the Torah before engaging in its study. It was not that we didn't study the Torah, but that we didn't first make the blessings on it. What's so bad about this that it caused the exile?

Reb Noson explains that in the blessing we say, "Who has chosen us from among the nations." We may indeed have studied, but the essence of Torah is its special nature that allows us to forge a relationship with God. If we did not recognize this relationship, we would no longer be deserving of it. Because of our lack of appreciation, God no longer concealed and constricted His majesty to this one place, and therefore it could no longer withstand His greatness and was subsequently destroyed.

As we reflect upon our enormous loss during these days, we should feel a renewed sense of hope. God has not changed His mind; had He wished to, we would have been destroyed rather than exiled. His greatest desire is to once again rest His Presence among us. Our spiritual exiles, whether national or personal, remind us that if we humble ourselves and lessen our egos, God will immediately reciprocate, lessening Himself by clothing His Presence once again in the *Beit HaMikdash* and in our personal lives.

Now is a time of great introspection. We can look at our lives and humble ourselves before God by admitting to our various deficiencies, whether in Torah study or prayer, or in our relationships with loved ones and friends. True, we may not immediately change, but by taking the first colossal step and honestly evaluating ourselves, we lessen our egos and make room for God within our hearts and lives.

Let's begin to rebuild.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, 219

What's in a Name?

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN REBBE NACHMAN'S fourth daughter was born, he didn't follow the common custom and name her at the next Torah-reading opportunity. Instead, days and days went by, and he had yet to provide his newest child with a name.

The Chassidim were confused by Rebbe Nachman's strange practice, and people around Breslov began to whisper that something seemed to be wrong—the Rebbe was withholding his own daughter's name! Reb Chaikel, one of Rebbe Nachman's closest students, couldn't hold back any longer. He went to visit his mentor at home to speak openly about people's concerns.

“Rebbe, if you don't do something, people will begin to say that the Breslovers no longer name their children!” Reb Chaikel added that Rebbe Nachman already had a number of opponents who were looking for excuses to vilify his followers. Would the Rebbe himself provide his enemies with ammunition?

In later years Reb Noson would say that Rebbe Nachman never made a fuss about something unless it was extremely important to him. Generally, if someone wanted him to do something and it didn't violate a principle of his, he would accommodate himself to their will.

Rebbe Nachman shrugged, “Nu, if you think so ... Let her name among the Jewish people be Chayah!” Reb Chaikel ran out to the synagogue to spread the news.

But later that day, unexpected news arrived from Mezhibuzh. Rebbe Nachman's mother, Feiga, had passed away. Now it all was clear! The Rebbe had only been waiting for the news to reach Breslov before he named his daughter after his beloved mother. Even if he knew by *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) that his mother was gone, he couldn't possibly give the name until the news reached Breslov by natural means.

Reb Chaikel was beside himself. What had he done?

After a time, Rebbe Nachman had another daughter, and this time he gave the name Feiga right away. But the girl died in infancy. The Chassidim would say, “Perhaps had it been reversed, and had the first girl been named Feiga and the second one Chayah [literally, ‘life’], the second daughter might have lived, too.”

Afterward Reb Chaikel lamented, “When, oh when, will I stop mixing into the Rebbe's business?!”

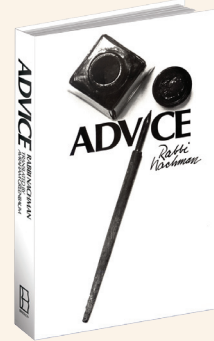
Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 220-221

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

EATING. 4. Whenever you feel a sudden strong impulse to eat, it is a sign that there are forces which hate you. This sudden appetite for food is caused by the animal part of your nature. You must break the animal impulse. Then you will be free from the clutches of those who hate you (*Likutey Moharan I*, 39).

7. Gluttony leads to divisiveness and strife. The glutton is an object of contempt. Other people look down upon him: they have no wish to help him; on the contrary, they put all kinds of opposition in his way. But a person who succeeds in breaking his greedy impulses will find peace. And peace will also reign in the realms above. A profound and wonderful contentment will reveal itself in the world (*ibid.*).



8. When a person is sunk in the desire to eat greedily, it is certain that he is far from truth. A person like this is under the force of the Divine aspect of strict justice. Greed is a sign of impoverishment to come, and will subject him to contempt and embarrassment (*ibid.*, I, 47).

9. When a person manages to break his desire for food, God works miracles through him (*ibid.*).



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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.