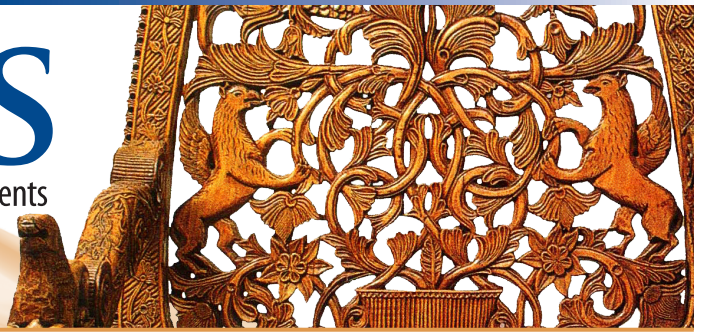


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Who Are You Doing Teshuvah For?

By Yossi Katz

LIFE IS SO incredibly topsy-turvy from the moment you wake up — or the moment you don't wake up!

The kids missed the school bus. Check.

The car door was left open and the ignition won't start. Check.

There was an accident on the highway and traffic is backed up for miles. Check.

So often it seems that life was engineered not to go our way. Guess what? There's actually a lot of truth to that.

It seems especially obvious when it comes to this month of Elul. Three times Moses ascended Mount Sinai to attempt to receive the Tablets. During the first episode on the 17th of Tammuz, certain Jews were serving the Golden Calf and Moses destroyed them. Shortly thereafter, Moses again ascended to plea and score favor for the Jewish People. Forty days later he descended from the mountain, seemingly unsuccessful. But just then, God called on Moses again and told him to ascend the mountain for another forty days and nights. It was during this period, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, that Moses successfully pleaded on behalf of the Jewish People and delivered the Tablets on Yom Kippur.

Elul is a month of incredible Divine favor. The word *ELUL* is an acronym for the verse “*Ani L'Dodi V'dodi Li* – I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3). God is waiting for us with outstretched arms and asking us to return to Him during this special time of year that is spiritually the easiest time for *teshuvah* (repentance). But if this were true, why when we attempt to work on ourselves and increase our merits during this month do we often find that things don't go our way?

Our *parashah* begins, “When you go out to war against your enemies” (Deuteronomy 21:10). Every war entails a

conflict between opposing sides. Similarly, we desire to do *teshuvah* and plan what we're going to work on. But then we're faced with life's opposing forces of turmoil (like the alarm clock not ringing in the morning). This creates an internal war that gives us much heartache, and may even cause us to abandon our *teshuvah* plans altogether. What can we do so that “HaShem your God will deliver him [your enemies] into your hands” (ibid.) and our desires will prevail?

The conflict we feel in our heart stems from our belief that we understand how life is supposed to proceed. However, every day presents various situations. When we are certain that our smarts and capabilities have the power to enforce our will and overcome whatever may be, we crash into a gigantic wall of opposing willpower. Whose will is this? God's!

When we do *teshuvah*, we accept God's will upon ourselves. Even if we have good intentions (and this is fine and proper), our goal is not to demonstrate that we are “professional *teshuvah*-doers.” Rather, we want to show that our whole desire is to accept God's will and rule over us.

This corresponds to the final part of the verse, “And you take him captive” (ibid.). Our job is to capture and incorporate God's wisdom and will into our lives. When things aren't going our way and we feel heartache, this is just God's friendly reminder that we're too caught up in ourselves; we aren't remembering that *teshuvah* is about returning to Him. Yes, we may have had a beautiful plan, but who was the plan beautiful for? Our *teshuvah* plan is not about hanging our report card on our fridge, but about doing God's will with utter purity and simplicity. To an outsider, doing a simple mitzvah when we had grander plans seems worthless and unappealing, but to God, its sincerity and wholesomeness is truly meaningful.

It's when we can demonstrate to God that we're willing to do His *teshuvah* that He will “deliver our enemies in our hands” by nullifying all opposing wills, and bless us with a sweet and successful life. Amen.

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 82

The First Two Rubles

By Chaim Kramer

FOR THE FIRST Rosh HaShanah after Rebbe Nachman's passing, about sixty chassidim traveled to Uman, where they were welcomed into the Shomrim LaBoker synagogue. The Breslovers prayed there for ten years until 1821, when there was simply not enough room anymore.

Next they prayed in the house of a Reb Mordekhai, and although he passed away, his family invited them to carry on holding their Rosh HaShanah services there. But the group outgrew Reb Mordekhai's house as well, and moved from place to place as their Rosh HaShanah gathering continually expanded.

Finally Reb Noson realized they had no choice but to build their own *kloyz* (synagogue). He came to Ladizin to rally support from the Breslovers there. A certain Reb Mendel told him, "Reb Noson, if you don't build our own shul, you won't have accomplished anything." Reb Noson knew this to be true, and he right away said to Reb Mendel, "If so, you be the one to start the mitzvah – give a contribution towards the building."

Reb Mendel earned his meager living with the work of his own hands. He ran home, took two rubles – his entire savings – and brought them to Reb Noson.

Knowing how poor Reb Mendel was, Reb Noson refused to take the money. Reb Mendel started crying. He pleaded with Reb Noson to have pity on him and not deprive him of the great merit of being the first to contribute for such a worthy cause. Reb Noson could no longer refuse.

Reb Mendel's self-sacrifice for the mitzvah was the firmest possible foundation for the *kloyz*, and Reb Noson was now certain it would be built. When he later visited the wealthy Breslovers in Tcherin, he told them about Reb Mendel's contribution. "This poor man gave me everything he could. You match it!"

Reb Noson said later, "With those two rubles, I built the *kloyz*!" He once commented, "We should ask ourselves if it was the money of the wealthy that built the shul or the yearning of the poor man to see the job done. It would be fair to say that it was the yearning of the poor that built the shul!"

*From "Through Fire and Water:
The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov"*

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

EATING. 22. Be careful not to gulp your food down hurriedly like a glutton. It was Esau who said, "Let me swallow some of this red pottage" (Genesis 25:30). Get into the habit of eating at a moderate pace, calmly and with the same table manners you would show if an important guest were present. You should always eat like this, even when you are eating alone. Happy is the one who achieves this! (*Chayey Moharan, Avodat Hashem* 69).



HOSPITALITY. 1. It is a very good thing to open the doors of your home to genuine Torah scholars who possess integrity as well as learning. Offering them hospitality will help you deepen your own faith. This in itself helps to counter the prevalent lack of belief. Hosting genuine Torah scholars helps make a *tikkun* for the "fallen Torah" which has passed into the hands of those who are learned but unscrupulous. The holy *Zohar* refers to these scholars as "Jewish demons" (*Zohar* III, 253a). They are the source of all the hostility to those who are truly God-fearing. The way to overcome this hostility is by offering hospitality to genuine Torah scholars (*Likutey Moharan* I, 28).

2. Everyone offers up bad prayers from time to time, and these prayers come back and confuse him when he stands up and tries to pray with devotion. Hosting Torah scholars is the *tikkun* for this (*ibid.* I, 209).



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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.