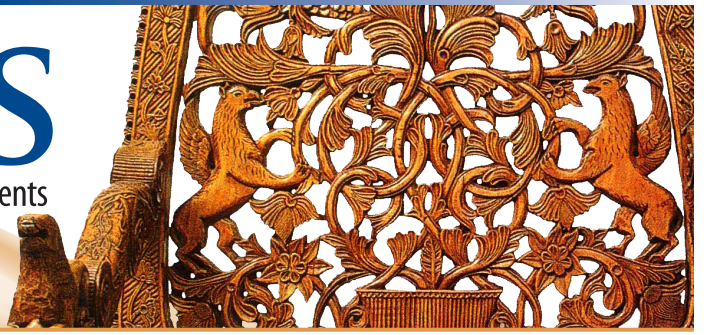


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Balancing Act

By Yossi Katz

HAVE YOU EVER wondered why Jacob was specifically chosen to father the twelve tribes and establish the Jewish nation? Weren't Abraham and Isaac also fitting figures? Yet despite their greatness, Abraham fathered a "Ishmael" and Isaac fathered an "Esau." What was Jacob's secret to perfection?

The Torah alludes to Esau's essential point by saying, "Isaac loved Esau because he trapped him with his mouth" (Genesis 25:28). Esau would ask Isaac how to tithe things like salt and straw, seemingly demonstrating his rigidness in observing the Torah (see *Midrash Tanchuma, Toldot* 8). Esau's tremendous resolve and exactitude could have earned him greatness, but instead its mismanagement became his greatest flaw.

Isaac did not perceive Esau as being sarcastic and was fooled. He saw in Esau the trait of holy chutzpah, something essential to spiritual success and something Isaac himself mastered. However, as awesome as Isaac was in mastering strictness and rigidness in the service of God, he had not mastered the ability to know when to mitigate this attitude with kindness. This imperfection caused Esau to be too harsh on himself. His narrow-minded approach made him demand nothing less than perfection – an attitude that ultimately leads to dejection.

The major conflict between Jacob and Esau surrounded the birthright. Spiritually, the birthright represents the opening of the womb, the creation of a new channel of influence. Through the birth of the firstborn, the spiritual legacy of the father can be manifest to future generations. All later births are but a continuation of this process. The Torah therefore mandates that the firstborn should receive a double portion of the father's inheritance. This is because he essentially owns the copyright and claims its royalties. He is the master of influence.

The main part of Isaac's estate was the weapon of prayer. Isaac's level of prayer held the keys to both spiritual and physical bounty. Its arms bearer could largely influence the direction of society. Rebecca knew that Jacob had to inherit this rite in order to bring the world toward its rectification. Not only would Esau potentially misuse this ability, but his flaws would inhibit his ever hoping to master its art.

The success of our prayers corresponds directly with our belief in their power. Jacob is called Tiferet Yaakov. Tiferet is the confluence of kindness and severity. Jacob is called "the wholesome one" (Genesis 25:27) because he mastered this most difficult balance. Kindness without restriction is like giving a child unlimited candy. But restriction for its own sake serves no purpose. Jacob's balancing act helped him understand that while none of his prayers were ever truly deserving of God's blessings, nevertheless, God still listens to and answers every prayer. His kindness and compassion are so great that every one of our prayers has tremendous value on high.

The more we perfect our trust and belief in God's appreciation for our efforts, the more potent our prayers become. When we reach this understanding and then experience salvation vis-à-vis prayer, we open the channel for all future prayers. We then become worthy of inheriting its capabilities.

Esau, in contrast, did not properly perceive God's incredible kindness. He could not fathom how anything less than perfection could be acceptable to the Master of the Universe. Therefore he could not inherit this potentially powerful weapon.

As the children of Jacob, we have inherited both a mighty weapon and a constant companion to face our daily challenges. Let us mitigate our negative thoughts by turning to God and relying on His never-ending compassion and love. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Nachalos 4

What Made Me a Breslover

By Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld

Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld, zt"l, was the great-great-grandson of Rabbi Aharon of Breslov, one of the two witnesses to Rebbe Nachman's famous pledge that he would save whoever came to his grave, recited the Tikkun HaKlali, and pledged a coin to charity. But while he was raised in a staunch Breslov home in the United States, the young Zvi Aryeh didn't feel the excitement of being a Breslover ... until one transformational experience.

Every Shabbat, my father would say a *shiur* in *Likutey Moharan* and try to impress upon me the fact that it's important being a Breslover. But it's difficult to inject *emunah* (faith) into a person, because everyone has freedom of belief. A person believes or doesn't believe according to his own whim. It's easier, of course, when you're brought up in a Breslov home and you go to yeshivah and learn.

Also, at that time, the type of learning then was different than it is today. I would safely say that an elementary student then knew more Gemara than a regular high school student at a yeshivah does now. But the interest in learning about Breslov did not reach a peak of excitement or feeling. It was matter of *mitzvas anashim milimada*, sort of lip service...

I got to a point where I felt that I wanted something more. I wanted to have a little more religion, a little more abstinence from pleasures, and this suddenly happened one night.

I began to think. The fact was that I was the son of one of the leading Breslovers in the world, and there must be something to it. Why not look into it a little more?

That night I selected the *sefer Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which deals with the topic of *hitbodedut*. It's a selection of statements about *hitbodedut*, praying to God in private, from different Breslov books. The introduction describes Rebbe Nachman's custom in this practice of *hitbodedut*, and how he became great through *hitbodedut*.

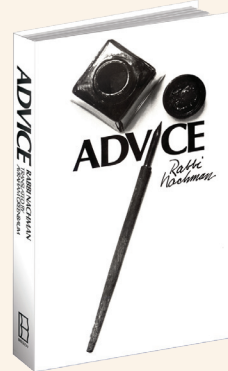
I began to read that very slowly, very carefully, and when I got to a certain very brief paragraph, something suddenly happened. It's difficult to describe. I felt somehow the gates of Heaven were opened.

Mazal Tov! This week's *Pathways* is dedicated to Rabbi Shlomo Katz on the birth of his daughter. May his family have lots of *nachas*.

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 3. Someone who knows that he is guilty of wasting the drops of his very mind and soul should be careful not to get involved in any of the conflicts and disputes between the Tzaddikim. He should believe in all of them. The various doubts and questions that arise in his mind when he sees the Tzaddikim in conflict with one another stem from the mental weaknesses he brought upon himself



when he wasted those drops of his very soul. Had his mind not been flawed, he would not find anything to trouble him at all (*Likutey Moharan* I, 5:4).

4. The guidance given by the Tzaddik and his followers are the foundation of the Covenant. But the smooth talk of those who oppose them, who have their own ideas about the right way to live, is

a denial of the Covenant and can only undermine it. The ideas that a person receives from another are like seeds planted in his mind. Advice and counsel are "drops of wisdom" which impregnate the soul.. A person who has given way to immorality in the past must be extremely careful to protect himself from the influence of these enemies of the truth. Otherwise he is in danger of losing his share in the World to Come, God forbid (*ibid.* I, 7:3).



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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.