

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Who Owes Who?

By Yossi Katz

THERE'S AN INTERESTING dialogue in our *parashah* between God and Moshe. God implores Moshe, "Please, speak into the ears of the people, and let them borrow [from the Egyptians], each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver and gold vessels" (Exodus 11:2). Why did He need to beseech Moshe? After all, who turns down a monetary gift, especially from their oppressor?!

In fact, God had promised Abraham some 400 years earlier that his nation would be freed from slavery and leave with great wealth. God was now requesting of Moshe, as a favor of sorts, to ensure that His word would be carried out (Rashi, *ibid.*).

Yet if God is kind and caring enough to humble Himself to a mere mortal in order to fulfill His pledge, why couldn't He simply have promised Abraham that He would make the Jewish people great and wealthy? Why was it ultimately for Abraham's benefit that the great wealth be bestowed on his offspring only after their experience of hundreds of years of servitude?

King David, a very wealthy man, said, "I am poor and destitute" (Psalms 109:22). Despite his great wealth, and because he was so humble, he understood that even being king of Israel did not mean that his wealth was owed to him. To the contrary, it was precisely King David who experienced a challenging childhood before becoming a great king who understood that everything was purely an underserved gift from God.

King Solomon, the wisest of men, declared, "There isn't a Tzaddik in the land who has done only good and not sinned" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). If even the great Tzaddikim are not complete in their service of God, what can be said of us? The goodness that we experience in our lives is not because God owes us, but because God loves us and seeks to give to us constantly.

"One who is little, is great" (*Zohar, Chayey Sarah* 122). In order to appreciate every goodness in our lives, we must first become humble. This is the attitude we exhibit as we chant the beautiful verses in Hallel: "He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts up the pauper from the dung hill, to seat them with princes" (I Samuel 2:8). Who is the one seated with the princes? He who feels as if he has been raised from the dust!

But the *Zohar* also says the opposite: "One who is great, is little" (*ibid.*). When we feel like more is owed to us, no matter how much wealth we accumulate, we won't be satisfied. I once hired a plumber to fix my bathtub. He told me about a certain wealthy woman who subscribed to a home-improvement magazine and re-hired him literally every six months to replace her Jacuzzi and bathroom furnishings with the latest trendy models. What was wrong with her new bathroom? Nothing, but doesn't she deserve the latest and greatest?

"Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his lot" (*Avot* 4:1). Each and every one of us was born completely naked. We began life this way to realize that everything we are later blessed with is a gift, to be appreciated and utilized. Likewise, in order for the Jewish People to fully appreciate the material and spiritual wealth that God would give them, they had to begin their collective national experience as slaves and only later experience great salvation and wealth.

We cannot experience the joys of freedom at the Pesach Seder without also tasting the "poor man's bread" (*matzah*) and the bitter herb (*marror*). A poor person is much better equipped to appreciate the simple things, like bread and water, as well as the bigger things in life. Sometimes life throws us lemons. These lemons are the opportunities to remember where we came from. They are precious points of reference that help us humble ourselves a bit so we can properly appreciate not only bread and water, but also our health, our families, our homes, our cars, and so much more!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Purim 6

Every Minute Counts

By Chaim Kramer

After Rebbe Nachman passed away in 1810, Reb Noson devoted the rest of his life to publicizing and explaining the Rebbe's wisdom to new generations of followers. Gifted with a phenomenal memory, he compiled several biographical books detailing Rebbe Nachman's life experiences, conversations, and advice. He began expanding the corpus of Breslov literature with the writing of his own magnum opus (Likutey Halakhot), prayers based on the Rebbe's lessons (Likutey Tefilot), and the Shemot HaTzaddikim (Names of the Tzaddikim), and sent hundreds of letters to his children and followers explaining the Rebbe's teachings.

NOT LONG BEFORE his passing, Reb Noson said, "The *ShaKh* was able to write as much as he did because he knew a Holy Name that caused his quill to move more quickly than a man could write. I did not have that Holy Name, but I was able to write as much as I did because I zealously guarded my time" (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh* I:726).

Guarding his time was the key to Reb Noson's tremendous productivity. He did everything with the greatest speed. Undressing and dressing in the mikvah, he was quicker than anyone else. When he wrote, his pen seemed to fly across the page. Even when traveling, Reb Noson spent all his time in the coach immersed in prayer and Torah study.

Above all else, he remembered what others tend to forget: he never let the day of death pass from his mind. Always mindful of the *takhlis*, the ultimate goal, he took great care to watch his every moment, never wasting or killing time. He accepted all that came his way as a test in serving God, and never allowed anything to stand between himself and his devotions. Regardless of what happened to him, and no matter how much suffering and embarrassment he was subjected to, he remained steadfast in his desire to serve God as best he could.

About three weeks before Reb Noson passed away, his watch broke. Right away he sent it to his son, Reb Yitzchok, in Tulchin, asking him to make sure it was repaired and returned to him in Breslov immediately. In his letter to Reb Yitzchok, Reb Noson emphasized how much he needed his watch. Even as he was nearing his end, Reb Noson was still zealous about each and every second!

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 24. Any transgression of the laws of the Torah stains the Shekhinah with the blood of impurity and sunders the Shekhinah from the Holy One. To rectify every single sin one by one would be impossible, because each transgression has many implications and ramifications: every prohibition has its fine points and subtleties. The only solution is the Tikkun HaKlali, the General Remedy. This is the *tikkun habit*, the rectification of the covenant. Through this, all of a person's transgressions are rectified. The healing influence of the Tikkun HaKlali has the power to reach the narrowest, most inaccessible channels of the soul which no other remedy can reach (*Likutey Moharan* I, 29:3).



25. One who has not yet achieved the Tikkun HaKlali has no right to speak. He does not know how to use speech as it should be used. Nor is he able to speak words that radiate Torah. For him to speak would be a transgression of the prohibition against tale-bearing (Leviticus 19:16), because anything he says amounts to slander. He is unable to keep secrets. But the Tikkun HaKlali confers on the one who achieves it the right to open his lips and speak. His words will be filled with the light of Torah (*ibid.* I, 29:6).

26. Sexual impurity can result in epilepsy, God forbid. The covenant is a protection against this (*ibid.* I, 29:7).



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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.