

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT PARASHAT YITRO • 5777 • VOL. 7 NO. 18

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The Tzaddik At My Side

By Yossi Katz

YITRO AND MOSHE could not have been more different from one another.

There has never been a man as great as Moshe. On three separate occasions, Moshe ascended to Heaven for forty days and forty nights. He neither ate nor slept, and had no physical wants or needs to look after while he was there (Deuteronomy 9:9). Moshe – a man of flesh and blood. Even the angels were jealous (*Shabbat* 88b). He was able to keep his physical form in Heaven because he had risen completely above its corporeality.

Yitro, on the other hand, was the Priest of Midian, something akin to a pope. One of his names was Putiel, because he had fattened (*puti*) calves in preparation for idolatry (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas* 2). In this week's *parashah*, Yitro says, "Now I have known that God is greater than all the gods" (Exodus 18:11). But how did he know? Because "there was not an idol in the world that Yitro had overlooked, or chased after and worshipped" (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:1).

Yet even before Yitro had converted, the Torah states, "Moses went out to greet his father-in-law, bowing and kissing him. They asked one man to his friend about each other's welfare and went into the tent" (Exodus 18:7). "One man" certainly refers to Moshe, who was the greatest of all men. It was specifically Moshe who asked about Yitro's welfare. This is remarkable! Moshe, the great Tzaddik, the angelic man, lowered himself to someone who had been king of the idols, someone with such a dirty and unholy past.

This is the way of the true Tzaddik. The Tzaddik does not stand on a pedestal and allow only those who are

"truly worthy," who have never done wrong, or who are of impeccable pedigree to approach him. Instead, the true Tzaddik brings himself right next to every person who has any degree of desire to come close to spirituality and Godliness. He descends right next to them as a true friend, encouraging them and providing the necessary advice for them to improve their ways and live a good life.

There was once a chassid who went to visit a prominent figure, hoping to gain a life-changing experience. Unfortunately, after the meeting, he was neither inspired nor changed. The chassid felt very bad about this and blamed himself. While recounting this episode to Reb Noson, the latter corrected him, saying, "Had the Tzaddik been even a greater Tzaddik, he could have had the power to encourage you, too."

Rebbe Nachman said, "*Gevalt!* Never give up hope! There is no such thing as despair." No matter where we're at or what we've done, the Tzaddik is there for us. He wants to be our friend. He is concerned for our welfare. He will not turn us away. Our job is to open our hearts, learn his teachings and follow his advice. By listening to his words and living by his dictums, our lives will change for the better.

In Breslov we have been blessed with two short but powerful classics. One is *Meshivat Nefesh* (Restore My Soul), which includes many of the Rebbe's incredible teachings of encouragement. The other is *Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which teaches every Jew how to forge a relationship with God through his or her simple words. We have the tools! We can open our hearts to the wisdom contained in these short books and live life with the Tzaddik standing together with us, holding our hand through every challenge and difficulty.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Bekhor
Beheimah Tehorah 4-22*

The Miracle of Children

By Chaim Kramer

MANY CHASSIDIC MASTERS are famous for their miracles and heroic exploits. Rebbe Nachman, on the other hand, is famous for his Torah teachings and the advice for living that he gave to every individual. Nevertheless, Breslov oral tradition records several instances in which the Rebbe demonstrated that he, too, could perform miracles.

Moshe Chenkes was one of the community leaders in Breslov who had welcomed Rebbe Nachman to the town. He became quite close to the Rebbe, through whose blessing his business prospered. He became extremely wealthy, but he had no children.

Moshe Chenkes asked the Rebbe to give him a blessing for children, but the Rebbe told him that the reason he was childless was because he had been the victim of theft: a former business partner had stolen money from him, and “stealing a person’s money is like stealing his wife and children” (*Likutey Moharan* I, 69). Shortly before Rebbe Nachman passed away, he said to Reb Noson, “If Moshe [Chenkes] divorces his present wife, he’ll be able to have children.”

At first Moshe Chenkes was uninterested in divorcing his wife. But one time when he met Reb Noson after morning prayers, the latter urged him, “Just as I am wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*, Rebbe Nachman said, ‘You will have children!’” A few years later, Moshe Chenkes’ wife agreed to a divorce. She asked for half his wealth, which he gave her, and then she married his former partner. He, too, remarried, yet a few years passed and he still didn’t have children.

Occasionally Moshe Chenkes would complain to Reb Noson, “After all, you’re the one who told me to divorce.” Finally Reb Noson told him, “Go to Uman and complain to the Rebbe at his grave. Say to the Rebbe, ‘I did as you told me through Reb Noson. I divorced my first wife. Where is the promise that I’ll have children from my second wife?’”

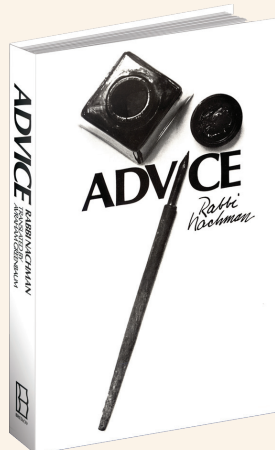
Moshe Chenkes went to Uman and prayed at the Rebbe’s grave. Upon leaving the grave, the first thought that came to his mind was “Sow for yourselves seeds of charity” (Hosea 10:12). At that moment, he felt as if Rebbe Nachman himself was standing next to him saying the verse. Upon returning to Breslov, Moshe Chenkes gave generously to charity. He was blessed with a daughter and a son.

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 32. Sexual temptation is the main test in life. It is sent as a challenge to refine us. This test puts you in a type of “exile.” You should cry out to God: scream and cry out to Him over and over again, like a woman in labor who cries out from the pain of her contractions. Cry out to God again and again until He takes pity and helps you to strengthen yourself and break your desire.

The secrets of Torah, which before were guarded, will now be unveiled for you. The greater the determination with which you stand up to the trial, the greater the revelation you will receive in Torah and devotion to God. You will be able to see the seventy faces of the Torah (*Likutey Moharan* I, 36:1, 2).



33. The *tikkun* for sexual fantasies is to say the words of the *Shema*: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” and the phrase which follows it, “Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever.” The twelve Hebrew words in these lines corresponds to the Twelve Tribes of God. By saying these words one attaches his soul to

the Twelve Tribes and separates it from the “mixed multitude,” which stems from the “harlot woman,” the “wicked maid.” This is the source of sexual lust, which is the root of all evil character traits (*ibid.* I, 36:3).



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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.