

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Joy of Clowning Around

By Yossi Katz

“**IT’S A GREAT** mitzvah to always be happy” (*Likutey Moharan* II, 24). This statement is perhaps Rebbe Nachman’s most famous quote. Not as well known is his “It’s a very grave sin to be depressed” (*ibid.* II, 48).

The spiritual wellsprings for the mitzvah of joy and happiness can be accessed especially in the month of Adar. Therefore our Rabbis teach, “When Adar arrives, joy increases” (*Taanit* 29a). And Purim is the climax. Mordechai and Esther commanded us thousands of years ago, “They should be to you days of partying and joy” (*Esther* 9:22). On Purim we can experience the deepest and most profound feelings of joy.

The Talmud asks, “Where is Haman in the Torah?” It answers by identifying *HaMaN* with the Tree of Knowledge, of which God said, “*HaMiN* ha’etz – Was it from the Tree?” (*Genesis* 3:11). Eve said she ate from the Tree because the snake fooled her with his logical arguments. These arguments all amounted to justifications for needing the additional knowledge that the Tree would provide.

This sophistication and logic denies us inner joy, which effectively severs our relationship with God. We remain in a state of prolonged exile and spiritual servitude because true joy has fallen to these evil forces and, consequently, we are overly influenced by feelings of sadness and depression. By obtaining true joy, we could free ourselves from their clutches and allow our spirits to soar. Indeed, to describe the time of our future redemption, the prophet Isaiah says, “In joy you will go out” (*Isaiah* 55:12).

The Hebrew word *mitzvah* is usually translated as “commandment,” but it also means “connection.” When we fulfill God’s commandments, we elevate our

temporal physicality and forge it with God’s eternal light. Each mitzvah allows part of us to transcend this world’s limitations and connect with the supernal. One who has simple faith in this process can reach a level of incredible joy and satisfaction. Everything in this world is seen as an opportunity for further connection.

But the forces of Haman keep trying to disrupt this process. Just as with Eve, they invade our heads with thoughts of sophistication and seemingly logical arguments to counter our spiritual beliefs. As we pursue these thoughts, we are cut off from joy and become further and further buried in sadness and depression. Therefore, after eating the forbidden fruit, mankind was cursed with “In sadness you will eat” (*Genesis* 3:17).

As we slip deeper into sadness, the joy which is no longer active becomes exiled and captured by the evil forces. As a result, matters of material and mundane pleasure become extremely appealing to us. Our souls crave the sparks of true joy hidden there, but we are blinded by our sadness and pay attention only to the pleasurable attractiveness.

Purim is the day we can change all this. By drinking and acting silly on Purim – actions that are usually frivolous – we force ourselves to be joyous in the place of evil. Showing that we are happy to be simple Jews who believe in the Torah and mitzvot, we are able to redeem fallen joy and reattach our essence to it. Rebbe Nachman once said, “It seems as if one can be truly happy only by acting silly.” This Purim, let’s go beyond our sad and depressing comfort zone and act silly with simple faith and joy. We will then begin the process of living a redeemed life of happiness. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nefilat Apayim 4*

# I'll Drink To That!

By Chaim Kramer

**THE SHULCHAN ARUKH** tells us that Purim is the one time in the year that imbibing alcohol is encouraged (*Orach Chaim* 695:2). Some Breslover Chassidim fulfill this mitzvah to the fullest; others exercise caution and drink only a little wine or liquor. Serving God in a joyous and hearty manner is the essence of the Purim celebration.

Reb Shmuel Shapiro was known as the “Tzaddik of Jerusalem.” His entire day was spent in Torah study and concentrated prayer, which he performed with an intensity known only in previous generations.

On Purim he would pray, read the Megillah, distribute the Purim charity and send his Purim presents. Then he would start drinking, and wouldn't stop until he had gotten good and drunk. Yet despite being totally inebriated, he talked of nothing else but serving God!

*Despite being totally inebriated, he talked of nothing else but serving God!*

In particular, he loved to talk about traveling to Uman, to Rebbe Nachman's gravesite. And no matter how plastered he got, Reb Shmuel would always sober up for the afternoon prayers. It was one of the most incredible things to watch.

Reb Noson scoffed at those Chassidim who used to sleep with a bottle of liquor under their pillows. Someone once tried to justify their action to him: “If, when these Chassidim wake up, Mashiach hasn't yet come, they put the evil inclination to sleep with a drink!”

“That won't help,” Reb Noson said. “Better to sleep with a book of Psalms under the pillow. If, when you wake up, Mashiach hasn't yet come, then begin reciting the Psalms one more time!” (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 68, #46).

We all have our share of problems to face, but the means for overcoming them is not in the bottle. Prayer helps. Meditation and inner strength help. Use your own spirit, not someone else's bottled version.

*From Crossing the Narrow Bridge*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**THE COVENANT.** 40. The “dogs” that snatch at the prayers of one who has not achieved sexual purity are the brash and arrogant people who disturb him and spoil his prayers (*Likutey Moharan I*, 50).

41. One who succumbed to sexual immorality in the past should be wary of dogs and the sword (*ibid.*).

42. The vanity of beauty leads men to the charm of deceit. There are many ways one can fall into deceit, be it in the way he stands, the way he eats, the way he speaks to people, and so on. No matter what he does, he must always think how will he *appear*: will he seem



charming and attractive? One who fails to guard himself against the attractions of female beauty will become a slave to the charm that he feels he must project (*ibid.* I, 60:3).

43. The vanity of beauty brings men to poverty (*ibid.*).

44. Life depends on breathing. Sexual desire affects the breathing, causing gaps between breaths.

This allows the bodily fluids to dry, which results in damage to the brain and the mind, because mental life depends on the fats and fluids in the body. This is why all forms of madness are caused fundamentally by sexual desire. Even in the case of those who are not actually insane but who lack stability and strength of character, the root cause is also sexual (*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.*