

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Know Where You Stand

By Yossi Katz

HAVE YOU HEARD about the great “celebration” that takes place this month? You are probably dreadfully eyeing Tuesday’s fast and the start of the Three Weeks of mourning, and wondering what in the world I am referring to. While describing this month of Tamuz, Rebbe Nachman teaches:

“The first letters of ‘*Zikhru Torat Moshe* (Remember the Torah of Moses)’ (Malakhi 3:22) spell out the word *TaMuZ* without a *vav*. This is because in the month of Tamuz, we must elicit mindfulness in order to rectify forgetfulness. For it was then that forgetfulness came into existence, as a result of the Tablets being broken in Tamuz. [The *vav*, which has the numerical value of 6, represents the Tablets, which measured six by six handbreadths.] As our Sages teach, ‘Had the First Tablets not been shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from the Jews’” (*Eruvin* 54a; *Likutey Moharan* I, 217).

Imagine, God Himself engraved the First Tablets! The Torah was so exalted that it was to be permanently engraved on our hearts and minds. Had we waited just a bit longer for Moshe to come down the mountain with the Tablets, we would have received a Torah that connected us to God in an unbreakable way. Instead, the Tablets were shattered and forgetfulness descended upon our nation.

Now we feel far, we feel distant, we feel utterly disconnected. Things happen and we lack any sense of clarity. This is all part of forgetfulness. True, we do have the Torah, but it doesn’t always speak to us; often we have a hard time finding the answers when we study it. So how do we connect? How do we deal with tragedy and pain, with difficult times and hard decisions?

In this week’s *parashah*, Bilam describes us as “a people that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). The word *BaDaD* (alone) has

the same root as *hitBoDeDut*. This is our defining quality, the key to our eternal survival and eventual success: *A Jew will stand alone with His Creator*. Even though it often seems as though the entire world is battling us and our beliefs, every Jew can courageously stand against the tide by turning to God. No practice better conveys this idea and generates the fortitude to act this way than secluding oneself in conversation with God.

Rebbe Nachman stressed the importance of speaking to God as if He were a true, close friend. When one speaks to a good friend, he feels free to pour out his whole heart and express all his emotions and deepest thoughts. Only by building a strong relationship with God can we develop ourselves to the extent that we realize that He is the only reality. Only then can we gain the strength to stand against the tide.

Every bit of pain we feel, every lack, can be transformed into a prayer. Every experience can be used as an opportunity to come closer. True, there will still be many things that we might never understand in this world. But we can turn to God and cast our burden on Him. We can better understand ourselves and reach clarity. And we can fill our lives with hope by praying for a better future.

God thanked Moses for breaking the Tablets. Why? Don’t we feel at a loss precisely because of it? Had the Jewish People worshiped the idol in the presence of the Tablets, the dichotomy of our actions before God would have been too great to bear. The resulting forgetfulness was the greatest of blessings: it gave us room to face God and build on whatever we lacked, rather than run away from Him and ourselves. By conversing about our forgetfulness and disconnect, we come to remember the Torah that was lost, while not feeling ashamed to stand before God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5:85

Look for the Good!

HOW OFTEN DO we look down on others, thinking they are not behaving the way they should? And how many times do we look down on ourselves, feeling that we'll never overcome our bad habits and self-defeating behaviors?

Rebbe Nachman gave us a powerful tool to counteract these thoughts: “Azamra! (I will sing!)” (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282). In this lesson, he explains that all we need to do is search for the good points. Everyone has at least one good point; even the most hardened criminal once held the door open for his mother, or gave a coin to charity. When you find one good point, look for another, and another. Thus you elevate yourself and others to the side of merit, enabling everyone to return to God.

Reb Noson writes:

The Rebbe told me he had been speaking with someone who was complaining bitterly about how terrible his behavior was. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days had turned into years and he had still not managed to extricate himself from his bad ways. But each time he would try even harder to control himself, and he was always struggling to get closer to God.

As the man complained how terribly he behaved, the Rebbe answered with great wisdom, saying in a tone of sincerity and simplicity: “Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad.”

At this the man got excited and said to the Rebbe, “But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew.”

“Only the slightest bit,” answered the Rebbe. He then told the man to make it a practice to go with the teaching of *Azamra!*

I understood the Rebbe to mean that this was precisely how he revived this man. He had already fallen so low in his own estimation that it was not possible to revive him with anything. It was only when the Rebbe told him that he was totally bad that he was startled and became excited. Then he started feeling a little of the holiness of the good points still inside him. Then the Rebbe told him to go with the lesson of *Azamra!*

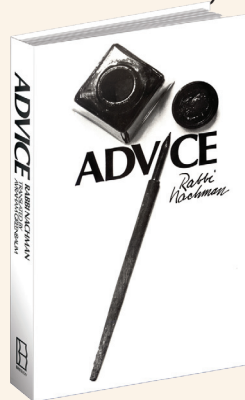
Based on Tzaddik #569

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

PRIDE & HUMILITY. 14. The more you succeed in breaking your pride, the greater your attainments in Torah will be. You will have the power to draw those who are far from God closer, and then the glory of God will be exalted and magnified. When glory is taken from the hands of those who have abrogated it to themselves and is restored to God alone, the awe of God spreads. Through awe, you can attain harmony within yourself, and this is the way to discover true prayer and achieve peace in all the worlds (*Likutey Moharan* I, 14:5).



15. Arrogance can actually cause a person to be imprisoned (*ibid.* I, 22).

16. There are times when people fail to guard their tongues. Then even those who are righteous and God-fearing will succumb to feelings of pride. ... Pride is the cause of

the “exile of the Shekhinah” (*ibid.* I, 58:10).

17. The less importance a person attaches to himself, the more drawing power he has: he is able to draw down the Shekhinah to the lowest worlds to dwell with us. This was God's desire from the day He created His universe. Such a person has the power to draw men closer to the service of God, and he can channel blessing and goodness to the Jewish people. And he himself is able to draw closer to the Tzaddik (*ibid.* I, 70).



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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.