

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Who Are You Doing Teshuvah For?

By Yossi Katz

LIFE IS SO incredibly topsy-turvy from the moment you wake up – or the moment you don't wake up!

The kids missed the school bus. Check.

The car door was left open and the ignition won't start. Check.

There was an accident on the highway and traffic is backed up for miles. Check.

So often it seems that life was engineered not to go our way. Guess what? There's actually a lot of truth to that.

It seems especially obvious when it comes to this month of Elul. Three times Moses ascended Mount Sinai to attempt to receive the Tablets. During the first episode on the 17th of Tammuz, certain Jews were serving the Golden Calf and Moses destroyed them. Shortly thereafter, Moses again ascended to plea and score favor for the Jewish People. Forty days later he descended from the mountain, seemingly unsuccessful. But just then, God called on Moses again and told him to ascend the mountain for another forty days and nights. It was during this period, beginning on Rosh Chodesh Elul, that Moses successfully pleaded on behalf of the Jewish People and delivered the Tablets on Yom Kippur.

Elul is a month of incredible Divine favor. The word *ELUL* is an acronym for the verse “*Ani L'Dodi V'dodi Li* – I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3). God is waiting for us with outstretched arms and asking us to return to Him during this special time of year that is spiritually the easiest time for *teshuvah* (repentance). But if this were true, why when we attempt to work on ourselves and increase our merits during this month do we often find that things don't go our way?

Our *parashah* begins, “When you go out to war against your enemies” (Deuteronomy 21:10). Every war entails

a conflict between opposing sides. Similarly, we desire to do *teshuvah* and plan what we're going to work on. But then we're faced with life's opposing forces of turmoil (like the alarm clock not ringing in the morning). This creates an internal war that gives us much heartache, and may even cause us to abandon our *teshuvah* plans altogether. What can we do so that “HaShem your God will deliver him [your enemies] into your hands” (ibid.) and our desires will prevail?

The conflict we feel in our heart stems from our belief that we understand how life is supposed to proceed. However, every day presents various situations. When we are certain that our smarts and capabilities have the power to enforce our will and overcome whatever may be, we crash into a gigantic wall of opposing willpower. Whose will is this? God's!

When we do *teshuvah*, we accept God's will upon ourselves. Even if we have good intentions (and this is fine and proper), our goal is not to demonstrate that we are “professional *teshuvah*-doers.” Rather, we want to show that our whole desire is to accept God's will and rule over us.

This corresponds to the final part of the verse, “And you take him captive” (ibid.). Our job is to capture and incorporate God's wisdom and will into our lives. When things aren't going our way and we feel heartache, this is just God's friendly reminder that we're too caught up in ourselves; we aren't remembering that *teshuvah* is about returning to Him. Yes, we may have had a beautiful plan, but who was the plan beautiful for? Our *teshuvah* plan is not about hanging our report card on our fridge, but about doing God's will with utter purity and simplicity. To an outsider, doing a simple mitzvah when we had grander plans seems worthless and unappealing, but to God, its sincerity and wholesomeness is truly meaningful.

It's when we can demonstrate to God that we're willing to do His *teshuvah* that He will “deliver our enemies in our hands” by nullifying all opposing wills, and bless us with a sweet and successful life. Amen.

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 82

My Soul Yearns for God

By Eliyahu Cohen

I GREW UP in Montreal in a traditional, but not observant, family. Although I knew that my friends were becoming religious, I didn't realize that they were into Breslov. I just knew that they were becoming close to God. One day, someone brought me a French translation of the Breslov book *Likutey Etzot (Advice)*. I began to read it, and it really spoke to me.

I decided to check out the Breslov Centre in Montreal. When I got there, Rabbi Saadia Elhadad, head of the center, was giving a class on *Likutey Moharan*. I saw the truth in his words and started attending Rabbi Saadia's class regularly.

Soon after I started attending the class, God sent me my soul mate. I had noticed her on Rosh HaShanah, but at the time, she was much more religious than I. I took her out for coffee. The following day, I had to travel to China on business. When I came back, I proposed. We were married in the summer. As soon as the *sheva berakhot* were over, we traveled to Israel. It was wonderful. We went to all the holy places and visited all the holy rabbis.

Back in Montreal, I asked my wife if I could travel with all my friends to Uman for Rosh HaShanah. It was our first year of marriage, and I knew that during that year, I wasn't supposed to leave her. I thanked the One who brought me close to Him when she agreed.

Traveling to Uman was an unimaginable experience. I felt as if an emptiness within my soul disappeared. So many different types of people were there, some connected to God, others totally not religious, yet I sensed that everyone – not just me – felt something inside them changing, that they were becoming whole again. In going to Uman, I felt that my *teshuvah* had become complete.

Going to Uman allowed me to feel. Before that, my Judaism was intellectual. In connecting to Rebbe Nachman, my soul started yearning for God. My soul has emotions, and being in Uman gave me permission to express those emotions. I felt secure there, like a babe in his mother's arms.

From "Rebbe Nachman and the Knights of the Rosh HaShanah Table"

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 10. A person who fills his mind with thoughts of Torah and devotion will always attain higher and higher levels of understanding. He will have nothing to fear from lurking evil and accusers. The forces of evil will flee from him. He will not be afraid of them at all (*Likutey Moharan* I, 21:11).



11. The month of Elul is especially propitious for attaining new levels of understanding that are still beyond you. When you succeed in bringing these levels within the range of your comprehension, you will then see further horizons beyond you. In this way, you form new garments for your soul and you will be saved from all evil (*ibid.*).

12. When a person performs a mitzvah, this mitzvah has the power to arouse all the worlds and draw them closer to God, and blessing spreads over all the worlds. The essence of the blessing that flows from the upper worlds is wisdom and the vision of Godliness. As the blessing descends to the lower worlds, the effect it has on each individual depends on the strength of his desire for God. One who wishes to develop spiritually should always aim to draw this blessing down upon himself. But he must also be sure that his intellectual vision is infused with faith. It is no good to rely upon wisdom alone (*ibid.* I, 24).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.