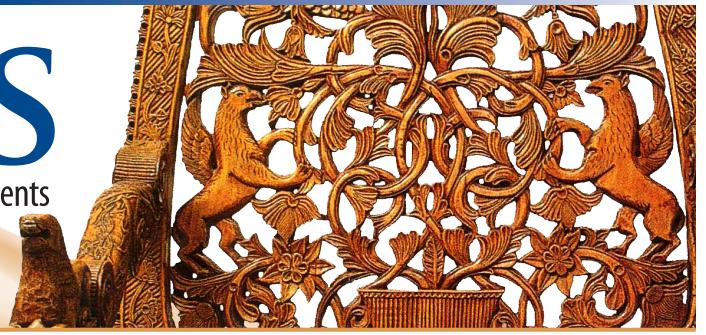


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Back to the Source

By Yossi Katz

THEY HAD EVERYTHING they could ever dream of. Living in the choicest part of globe with unlimited food and on a permanent sabbatical, they found the Garden of Eden a true paradise. Yet there was still “something else” that glittered as it hung from a tree. The forbidden fruit somehow lured Adam and Eve into losing everything and caused catastrophic spiritual damage to the world.

On Rosh HaShanah the world was created. Unlike our current existence, everything was originally created to function in an orderly system – “maintenance free.” In fact, things would sprout fully developed and ready for consumption. The only exception was the one thing that was off-limits: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were commanded not to partake of its fruits. But the snake ensnared them, “You see that you rule over the world. Everyone hates their competitor. The reason God told you not to eat from the tree is because if you eat from it, you will become the master ruler just like Him!” This was the challenge of Adam and Eve. Would they take the multitudes of blessing that they were granted, appreciate their Source and serve God using them, or would they act selfishly and think that they were great because of them and forget God altogether?

Since Creation, things haven’t changed much. We are each endowed with special blessings and capabilities of both material and spiritual nature. It is our duty to recognize the purpose of being granted these blessings. When we see them for what they are, we can appreciate them and use them properly by connecting with the Ultimate Source through them. By doing this, we rise above the materialism of this world and connect to God in the most beautiful and meaningful way.

But so often we see people who are blessed with things like earthly riches. Despite the fact that God is the Source of all goodness, this newfound wealth actually causes them to forget Him and serve themselves and their own selfish ideas. But isn’t this counter-intuitive? Shouldn’t we feel humbled and recognize the obvious source of our success? Just like Adam and Eve, it is human nature to revert back to our selfish tendencies.

As we approach the month of Tishrey and the New Year, we are once again presented with an awesome second chance. The word *TiShReY* symbolizes being “out of order,” as the letters appear in the reverse order of the Hebrew alphabet. Similarly, the name *ChaVaH* (Eve), who convinced Adam to eat from the forbidden fruit, is spelled in reverse order vis a vis the alphabet. Rebbe Nachman explains that God causes topsy-turvy events to disrupt our perceived lifestyles and schedules to remind us that He is the Source and the purpose of all.

Everything in creation was created for our sake because God is a loving and kind Creator. But we can only maximize our benefit when we use His blessings to connect to the everlasting spiritual reality of creation. Even material things were created only for spiritual purposes. When we forgot all this, we are sent these reminders. Things around us seem to spiral out of our control and we begin to see that we are really in charge.

This is the purpose of Rosh HaShanah and Creation. When we ask God to renew our lives for another year with great blessing and opportunity, we are asking Him to invest in our ability to recognize Him. By seeing the signs He sends us and accepting them with love, we humble ourselves and draw ourselves and the world back into alignment with His rulership. *Teshuvah* means returning everything to God. By humbling ourselves, we trade the chaos of a selfish life for a faithful life of paradise and tranquility.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Netilat Yadayim 3

The Courage to Grow

By Danny Goldschmidt

MY PARENTS HAD instilled within me an understanding and appreciation of the seriousness of Rosh HaShanah. But it was in Uman, inspired by the people around me, that I experienced for the first time the ability to really, almost effortlessly, pray with *kavanah* (concentration and feeling).

While you are there, you have nothing to do except the things that you are supposed to be doing on Rosh HaShanah—to pray, to think, to be meditative, to look back and reflect on what you’ve done the past year and consider how you want to change. During those few days of uninterrupted time with friends and fellow pilgrims, we enjoyed the opportunity for extended conversations on these life issues, something that I would never have had the time, let alone the mental space, to do elsewhere.

I also found that because there were no filters or distractions, I was able to open myself to experiencing emotion during the *davening*. In my regular shul, because of the presence of all my friends from the community that is part of my daily life and all of its concerns, it’s easy to get distracted from the central purpose of Rosh HaShanah. But in Uman, it’s easy to stay focused.

The people around you are praying, too. It’s obvious that they are really communicating with God and making their feelings and desires known to Him. People sing, shout out loud, scream, cry! It’s not artificial; it’s real. I dislike *davening* with people who think that they have to put on a show or act in a particular way to simulate emotions that they are not really experiencing. But in Uman, people *are* experiencing and in sync with their feelings. That had a great impact on me. It’s something that I still aspire to in my daily life.

Traveling to Uman helped me bring out the best in myself and experience ridding myself of things that aren’t important. It helped me to clarify my priorities and strengthen my positive and constructive tendencies, which had until then been obscured by unnecessarily focusing on details rather than looking at the broad view of things.

From “Rebbe Nachman and the Knights of the Rosh HaShanah Table”

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 13. Each individual must strive to free himself from the power of fantasy and imagination and acquire true wisdom. It is no good to follow one’s animal instincts or the attractive images they evoke in the mind. One should pursue wisdom alone, which is completely opposed to impulse.



The power of impulse derives from the faculty of fantasy and imagination. Animals also have this faculty, and therefore they also have these desires. Such desires are nothing more than the stubbornness of the heart, and one who follows them is literally like an animal. A man must free himself from stubbornness and break his heart of stone. He must follow

intellect alone (*Likutey Moharan I*, 25:1).

14. A person may succeed in breaking the hold of his desires and fantasies and thereby establish his commitment to a life founded on wisdom. But his intellect is still only in potential. He must bring it into actuality by using it to think deeply about how to serve God. When he succeeds in attaining the ultimate level of wisdom that man can achieve, he will have won eternal life for himself after his death (*ibid.*).

15. When a person’s words lack understanding, they lack goodness – and then they will neither be heard nor accepted. They do not come into the category of “speech” at all (*ibid. I*, 29:1).



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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.