

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Living in the Here & Now

By Yossi Katz

IT WAS ONE of the greatest challenges of all time, the greatest sacrifice ever asked of a man: to offer up his own son. We often explain the difficulty of Abraham's test according to the pain a loving father must endure in killing his beloved child; or because Abraham, being the worldwide leader of monotheistic religion, was being asked to do something that mimicked the lowliness of the pagan religions. But let us look deeper.

God Himself came to Abraham and asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham understood better than anyone else what God was all about. He knew that God is compassionate, and that everything He does is for our good. Abraham had already been tested many times, and each time he demonstrated his faith in God and subsequently experienced his personal salvation. So why was this challenge considered so much more difficult than the others he had already faced? Why is it so great that on Rosh HaShanah – the Day of Judgment – we read this story in defense of our very lives?

The answer is that Abraham's challenge had nothing to do with the actual slaughter of his son. He was absolutely ready to perform this faithfully. But God had just said that Isaac would be his progeny and his spiritual legacy. And now He was telling him to kill Isaac. Wouldn't anyone be confused by the conflicting messages he was receiving? But Abraham was made of greater stuff. He did not question God's ability to make one out of two seemingly conflicting things. He was able to rise to the level where faith in God became his personal reality, even when all his senses screamed out, "This is impossible!"

The Torah hints to Abraham's faith in the verse "And he saw the place [of the future Temple] from afar ... And he called the name of that place *HaShem-Yireh*, as it is said

to this day, 'In the mount where God is seen'" (Genesis 22:4-14). On his way to killing his son, Abraham saw the future site of the Temple. He understood that the Jewish people would be born and that God's Presence would one day rest there. True, this was very "far" fetched, considering the task he was currently charged with; nevertheless, he strengthened his faith in God and behaved as though he saw God's very promise unfolding before him.

How did Abraham reach this level? By focusing on the "today" and the "now." The exact details of how things were going to work out mattered little to him. God asked him to do something, and he put all his concentration and devotion into fulfilling His request.

Elijah the prophet was asked, "When will you come [to usher in the messianic era]?" He answered, "Today, if you will heed my voice" (*Sanhedrin* 98a). One may ask: Certainly there were many great Tzaddikim who completely fulfilled God's precepts; if so, why has Mashiach not yet arrived? Although it's impossible for us to grasp, these great Tzaddikim actually did bring the Mashiach. Yes, it is currently being withheld due to the actions of others, but the day will come when their actions will be recalled and we will see that, indeed, Mashiach did come.

Each of us has similar questions. Challenged by various tests, we often we feel we've given it our best, but we don't see our salvation. When will our personal "Mashiach" finally come? Like Abraham, we must be capable of lucidly envisioning our future redemption: yes, the day will come. More importantly, we have to live in the present. The "how" and "when" is in the hands of God, for God is capable of creating one even out of two opposites. But we are capable of focusing on what matters right now, and by living this way, we, too, can make peace out of all our conflicts. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Matanah 5

Keep Smiling!

By Chaim Kramer

REB AHARON OF KIBLITCH was a devoted Breslover chassid who was known for his extraordinary diligence in Torah study and his cheerful demeanor, which was immediately apparent to all who saw him. Though beset with financial difficulties and other hardships, Reb Aharon always managed to remain happy, singing and dancing at the slightest excuse. Needless to say, his joy was contagious.

He once described how after an especially lively dance, the evil inclination had taunted him, “Aharon! You are the poorest man in town. You have all sorts of problems. Where did you find the joy to dance with such enthusiasm?”

“I borrowed it,” he readily admitted. “I borrowed that dance from the better days ahead!”

Based on Oneg Shabbat, Hosafot, p. 525

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THE LEGENDARY POLISH Breslover chassid and tzaddik, Reb Ben-Zion Apter, lost his entire family during the Holocaust. Somehow he survived and immigrated to Israel, where he was a favored guest in the courts of many great Chassidic rebbes.

In his later years, he would go to weddings and other celebrations to collect money for the poor, even though he lived in dire poverty himself. A skilled *badchan* (wedding entertainer), Reb Ben-Zion would sing and dance, invent rhymes in Yiddish and pretend to play the violin, holding an invisible bow across his outstretched beard.

Once he entertained a wedding party that included David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel. Ben-Gurion laughed at the old chassid’s antics until tears came to his eyes.

“For me, a good laugh is a rare and precious thing,” Ben-Gurion confessed. “How can I repay you for this?”

“*Ich hob tzuris mit di tzeyner* – I have troubles with my teeth,” the *badchan* answered, gesturing comically at his poorly-fitting, false teeth to indicate the legitimacy of his request.

Ben-Gurion immediately gave Reb Ben-Zion his dentist’s business card and promised to make all the necessary arrangements right away.

Some time later, after receiving the finest dentures available, Reb Ben-Zion also incorporated this into his routine. “Look!” he would tell everyone, pointing to his mouth. “These are Ben-Gurion’s teeth!”

Heard from R’ Akiva Greenberg, who, as a young yeshivah student, attended Reb Ben-Zion Apter

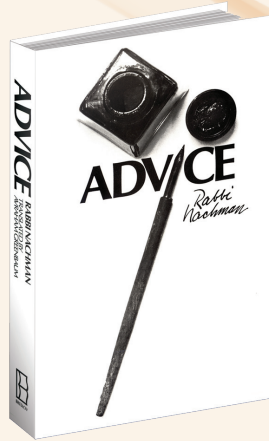
SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 28. There are different kinds of sleep. Physical sleep gives rest to the mind. Learning Torah may also be considered as “sleeping” in relation to intense devotion to God through prayer, meditation and contemplation. “Learning” here refers to the study of the simple meaning of Torah. Another kind of “sleep” is business activity, when conducted in faithfulness and with integrity. When a man conducts his business affairs with the requisite faithfulness and integrity, his mind and soul are thereby refreshed, acquiring fresh illumination from the inner light of God.

In all these different kinds of “sleep,” the essential thing is always faith, and it is necessary to guard one’s faith very carefully. Then, when his mind becomes tired, he can infuse it with fresh life through his faith by turning to one of these kinds of “sleep.”

This is the reason we recite the *Shema* before retiring to sleep at night. When we do so, we should say the words with intense concentration in order to bind the soul with faith during the hours of sleep. The soul will then be refreshed, as it is written, “New every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23). Our sleep will bring us a new mind and a new soul from the inner light of God (*Likutey Moharan* I, 35:4-6).



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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.

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