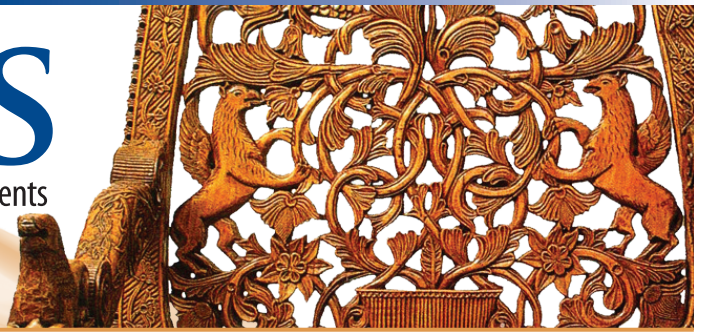


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Striking It Rich

By Yossi Katz

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU that I know the secret to accumulating wealth? I bet you'd want to be my friend. Doesn't the prospect of gaining this elusive knowledge get you a tad bit excited? But what if I told you that it's available to each of us? Impossible, you might say. But that would be your mistake.

God promised Abraham that his children would descend to Egypt as slaves, but would eventually be redeemed with great wealth. In fact, this week's *parashah* states, "They emptied out Egypt" (Exodus 12:36). Now, don't feel bad for the "poor" Egyptians! Essentially, prosperity was God's way of rewarding His loyal servant, Abraham. But if that was so, why not just straight out bless his children with wealth? Why was it necessary to reward Abraham by first enslaving his descendants?

The key to this riddle is that one cannot become rich unless he is poor first. King David, as the monarch, was obviously fabulously wealthy. Yet he would constantly proclaim, "For I am poor and destitute." Why? Because even the total Tzaddik, the one who is completely righteous in his deeds, can never repay God for all the goodness in his life. Therefore the verse states, "Because regarding mankind, there is no righteous person in the world that does only good without sinning" (Ecclesiastics 7:20). King David understood that no matter how righteous he was, in comparing his actions to the great kindnesses that God had bestowed upon him, he would always fall short. Therefore he saw himself as the poorest and most destitute. Whatever he had was not his; he was eating out of someone else's hand. Where's the pride in that?

What about us simple folk? We are certainly no King David. Should we not feel incredible humility before

God, as Job said, "In nakedness I left my mother's womb" (Job 1:21)? Our starting point is the realization of our humble beginnings. We are God's creation; our actions (or inactions) simply cannot begin to repay our awesome debt.

This understanding is truly the greatest blessing. Our Rabbis teach, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion" (*Pirkey Avot* 4:1). As we develop this attitude, we begin to appreciate everything that we have in our lives and begin to accumulate true wealth.

Someone who is not happy with his portion makes a few bucks and runs to spend his money on status symbols and the latest fads. No matter what he accumulates, his eye is already focused on the next big buy and he's never content with what he has. This can't be considered wealth, because his possessions aren't worth anything to him. But the humble fellow, even when he comes into great riches, never loses his appreciation for the simple things that benefited him until now. His possessions never depreciate; they only yield great profit.

Yes, God could have simply rewarded Abraham by blessing his children with great wealth. But would it have meant anything to them? Would they have appreciated it, or would it have caused them to lust after money and possessions, becoming enslaved to His very blessing? Instead God, in His great kindness, did the complete opposite. He brought about the temporary enslavement of our people, so that we would be able to see things in true perspective. Rather than being drawn after money, we could rise above the temptation of the vanity of wealth and utilize this great blessing to benefit ourselves and others.

The secret to wealth is remembering that we are poor. As long as we remember our heavenly balance, we can adjust our bank accounts down here any which way we like.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Megillah 6:11

The Burnt Book

By Chaim Kramer

WHILE REBBE NACHMAN left us many original and practical teachings, he ordered one of his works to be burned. This was the *Sefer HaNisraf*, “the Burnt Book.”

In 1807 Rebbe Nachman called his main disciple and scribe, Reb Noson, to his room to continue the transcription they had begun over two years earlier. Reb Noson writes:

“I sat with the Rebbe for several hours. He dictated the work word by word, and I wrote. All the other chassidim waited outside. When I finally came out, I scarcely knew the difference between day and night. Even though I had no idea what I had written, the little distant glimmer of understanding I had of the awesome greatness of this work filled me with such fire and passion that I hardly knew where I was in the world.”

But he would never have the chance to study it. In 1808, when the Rebbe was critically ill in Lemberg, he told his disciple, Reb Shimon, that he had a decision to make: either he had to burn the book, or else die in Lemberg. The answer seemed obvious to Reb Shimon, but the Rebbe hesitated, because he, and only he, knew of the exaltedness of the teachings contained in the book.

Finally the Rebbe said, “If that is the case, here is the key to my drawer. Go quickly! Hurry! Don’t delay! ... Go as fast as you can to Breslov. When you get there, take two books – one of them is lying in my drawer, the second is in my daughter Adil’s chest. Take them and burn them. But for God’s sake, be as quick as you can!”

Reb Shimon ran out to hire a coach. When he reached Dashev, not far from Breslov, he suddenly fell ill and was bedridden. He ordered that he be carried out to the coach and laid inside. As soon as the coach arrived in Breslov, his health returned. He took the two books (the original and Reb Noson’s copy) and burned them both.

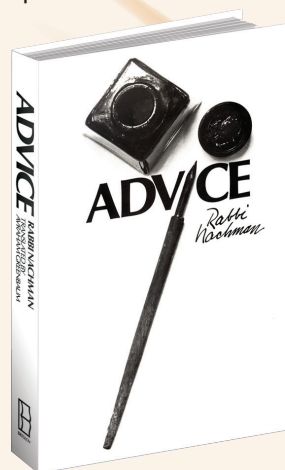
Reb Noson concludes, “The Rebbe said this book would not come into the world again. We lost something that will never return. The Rebbe said that this book had to be burned, and his other work, the *Likutey Moharan*, would be the one to be printed and spread throughout the world.”

*From “Through Fire and Water:
The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov”*

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SPEECH. 7. It is a great thing if you persevere in learning Torah in spite of poverty or other trials and pressures. This is the way to achieve perfection in your speech. A thread of lovingkindness will be drawn down



over you and the forces of stern justice and impurity ranged against you will be thrust aside. Your speech will become cleansed and elevated. The words will flow out in song and praise to God – you will pray with strength and fire, and your heart will be aroused to serve God with true devotion. In the end, you will be worthy of speaking the pure truth before God,

the truth in your heart will flow forth, and you will be filled with a fiery passion to return to God (*Likutey Moharan* I, 38, 4-5).

8. Empty words devoid of holiness give strength to the temples of idolatry. The hand of falsehood is strengthened and the exile deepens. All contact with the spirituality of the Land of Israel becomes lost. Truth is concealed; divisiveness and strife multiply. The Shekhinah is locked in strife with Her children, exiled as they are from their Land and the table of their Father. But words of holiness put strength into the hand of Truth (*ibid.* I, 45).



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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.