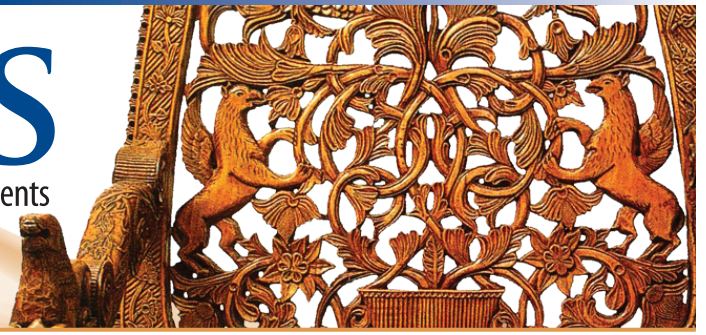


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Distance Is An Illusion

By Yossi Katz

“THE ESSENCE OF God’s greatness is that the very person who is most distant from Him can and should serve Him... There is a common misconception among young people that this principle does not apply to them, for a person may think he has too deeply tainted himself and has done too much wrong. But the truth is just the opposite – this principle applies especially to him! A person’s main test in life, and the essence of the refining process he must undergo, is that through all the declines and falls and through all that he experiences, he should not allow himself to become distanced from God, from Torah or from prayer” (Healing Leaves, p. 65).

I know it’s not Sukkot season, but I have a related thought. You see, being handy is not one of my good qualities, and while I know others who appreciate the handyman qualities that building a sukkah tends to bring out, I personally get stressed by the experience. A few years ago, I invested in an expensive type of sukkah that was guaranteed to just “snap together,” no tools necessary! Well, all I can say is that I had a difficult time figuring out exactly where the tall and heavy boards were supposed to “snap together.”

Now consider how awkward it was for the Jews journeying for so many years in the desert to be lugging with them all the components of the Tabernacle, assembling and disassembling this structure at every stop. Surely it would have been easier to set up a permanent structure. What was the purpose of all the schlepping?

Additionally, when the Tabernacle was set up, there were very strict rules based on its sanctity regarding who could go where. Someone who violated these rules was liable to the death penalty. Yet after the Tabernacle was disassembled and moved, its previous resting place

retained zero sanctity. If we compare the Tabernacle with its permanent replacement, the Holy Temple, the difference is striking. Even today, the Temple Mount retains a level of sanctity that restricts Jews from entering its precincts. Why was the Tabernacle different?

By building the Golden Calf, the Jews stumbled in the cardinal sin of idol worship. God’s awesome revealed glory that they had just experienced at Mount Sinai during the Giving of the Torah became hidden from them. Because of this, the Land of Israel, the place where Godliness is openly revealed, was also inaccessible to them. Therefore they were forced to journey from place to place in a barren desert, so far removed from the Promised Land that lay just ahead.

But even in moments like these, God does not forsake us. Inasmuch as every place is filled with God’s glory, God chooses to reveal Himself openly only in places of sanctity. Yet even when we are so distant, if we choose to search for Him and call out to Him, there is a place above time and space where we can access the most awesome levels of Godliness, a place of no boundary.

Therefore God commanded us to take gold, silver and copper – the very same materials that were used to construct an idol – and build for Him a temporary home, the Tabernacle. The same materials that brought about so much evil now brought redemption. Despite their having been used for unholy purposes, and in general being materials used for mundane work and trade, God revealed to us that even they could become a transformative instrument. Precisely because the holiness revealed at the places where the Tabernacle stood was so great, this holiness could have no permanent setting.

God’s greatness is unfathomable. Let us always search for it.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot,
Geviyat Chom MeYesomim 3*

Open Hands, Open Hearts

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONE OF THE MAIN *mitzvot* of Purim is *matanos le'evyonim*, giving gifts to the poor. Breslover chassidim would point out that Rebbe Nachman taught that giving charity is an *avodah*, a Divine service, that requires an investment of effort (*Likutey Moharan* II, 4). Charity is the means to open all the doors and channels of blessing, and needs to be undertaken with focused attention. This obviously applies even more on Purim, when we have an obligation to give charity to two deserving parties, even if we don't have many resources of our own.

A certain Breslover chassid was feeling resentful about always being approached to donate to supposedly worthy causes. He asked a friend for advice on how to give charity with an open heart. The friend replied, "Rebbe Nachman explained that whenever something gets you angry, you need to transform your cruelty to compassion. By putting yourself in the position of the poor – really identifying with their pain and struggle – you'll feel real compassion for them. Then you'll want to help them in any way possible."

Reb Mordechai Barbinitzer was a wealthy man who gave large amounts of charity to the poor. Everybody loved him; his heart was wide open to anyone who needed his assistance. Although he was very well-to-do, whenever he arrived in Uman he would not hire a wagon to carry him from the train station to the *kloyz* (the Breslov synagogue), which was quite a distance away. People naturally wondered why he didn't take a wagon as the wealthy usually do.

"If I take a wagon, it will be very difficult for me to empathize with how hard it is for the poor, who have to walk this distance," he explained. "So I walk to see how they feel, and make sure to open my heart and purse to support them."

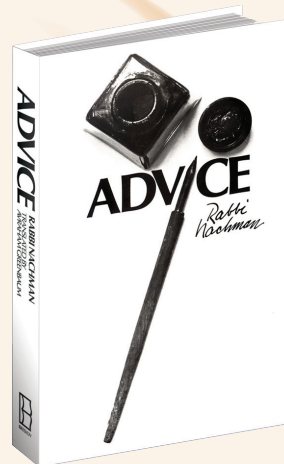
Reb Mordechai owned a factory that manufactured soap. Once, a few drops of a caustic chemical dripped on his hand and he got a nasty burn. He turned to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Bender, who was present at the time, and said, "Look how hard we work, even burning our hands! But we're willing to do all this to earn more and more money, so that we'll be able to provide for the poor!"

Based on *Siach Sarfey Kodesh* VI:284, IV:456

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SPEECH. 17. Speech derives from the Divine aspect of Gevurah, which denotes strength and severity. Therefore all speech must be sweetened through studying Torah and speaking words of goodness and holiness. This is



the reason we must be so careful to avoid any form of degenerate speech, especially derogatory comments about other people. More than anything else, this applies to the way we talk about the Tzaddik. To cast aspersions on the Tzaddik arouses the force of severity in the world, and can cause the Tzaddik to fall from his level if he lacks sufficient force to sweeten it. He may even die because of this, and

then the harsh forces are sweetened by the departure of his soul from the world.

18. When a person sits down and starts discussing someone else it is a "day of judgment," for he is in effect sitting in judgment on his neighbor. You must be very careful about this. Take a good look at yourself and ask if you are worthy to pass judgment on your friend. Judgment belongs to God, as our Rabbis said, "Do not judge your friend until you have reached his place" (*Avot* 2:4). Who really knows the place of his neighbor, and who can come there except God alone? (*Likutey Moharan* II, 1:14).



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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.