

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Tonight We Are Free

By Yossi Katz

WE ALL WANT to be free. While the guarantee of human rights and freedom is accepted throughout the Western world, the potential to attain a state of spiritual freedom for many couldn't be further from reality. The emancipation of our ancestors from Egypt shows us how to achieve our own spiritual and emotional freedom.

The story of our people begins with our descent to the spiritual wasteland of Egypt. Pharaoh forced the Jewish workers into hard labor so they would have no time to use their minds to perceive a greater purpose. Pharaoh believed this would ultimately destroy their dignity and identity.

Pharaoh was the personification of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) and the forces of evil. At every moment of challenge or difficulty, the *yetzer hara* jumps in to overwhelm us. While today we may not be tasked with hard labor, we often fall prey to mental anguish and being emotionally overwhelmed. Just as debilitating as hard labor are the feelings we have when our thoughts overwhelm us and cause us to doubt God's love for us and His involvement in our lives.

This process is called *chametz* (souring or fermenting). What begins as a telling experience or new insight enters our mind and begins to ferment. We start analyzing and analyzing again, sending our thoughts into turmoil. "Why did this happen to me? What does it mean? How could God do this?" The questions and doubts cause a loss of self – out of desperation, we can become subservient to our base desires and pleasures. In the same way that receiving a great deal of wealth can overwhelm a person and destroy his life, so too, higher-level knowledge either learned or experienced has the same potential danger.

The Jews in Egypt, being at the forty-ninth level of impurity, were not in a state where they could properly receive the miracles of God. Their low spiritual level produced a compromised intellect, which would have misrepresented the miracles in a harmful way. God therefore performed an awesome miracle that is repeated every year at the Seder: He blessed us with the key to receiving higher knowledge in a constructive way – truth.

When one enters into an intellectual quandary, if they are absolutely steadfast in their desire to come to the true answer, they will eventually discover it. However, if they only care about flexing their mental muscle-power or have other selfish motives, they will become completely misled. It is the same way with spiritual challenges. By taking the advice of the Torah and Tzadikim to heart and pursuing the true path to God with absolute sincerity, one will eventually arrive at the ultimate truth. On Seder night, God "passes over" life's process of discovering truth and shines the actual light of truth down on us so we can re-experience the miracles of Pesach with clear eyes, as if we experienced the true nature of the miracles first-hand.

But for this very reason, God tells the Jews on Pesach, "Hurry!" On this night there is no time to allow the experience of the night to become *chametz*. We can't risk thinking too much. We must soak in the experiences in a way that will empower us, knowing that God is with us in every aspect of our lives. Only later, when we have attained true faith, can we begin on our own to face life's experiences in a way that we don't get overwhelmed or fall back into the *yetzer hara's* mental trap.

But for tonight, we are free. Let us all drink to that, and allow our minds to reach the higher places that we will ultimately arrive at some time in the near future. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pesach 7

Pesach Stories

Man is incapable of a sudden confrontation with his Creator. The overwhelming experience of such awareness is just too awesome. Truth, the stark Truth, must be camouflaged. Only then can the soul gradually absorb it.

God, so to speak, camouflaged Himself in stories. These are the stories of the Creation and of Adam and Eve, the stories of the Flood and of the Patriarchs, the stories of Jewish exile and redemption. God is hidden in all the stories of human history, and in the as-yet-untold stories of each and every human being – his trials, his tribulations, and his salvation.

At the Pesach Seder, we tell stories – *Maggid*. We recount the stories of the exile in, and the redemption from, Egypt. These represent the collective stories of mankind. They typify the individual stories of each and every one of us. As we relate the details of these stories, we must relate to them. Be aroused by them. See the Hand of God in the stories of our own lives.

Through the telling, we bring to life *their* stories. In turn, may God bring to life the story of *our* Redemption (*Likutey Halakhot, Nedarim 5:6-8*).

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Reb Noson would recite the Haggadah with great fervor and emotion. Often the members of his family were too afraid to look at him during the Seder, so great was the awe and fear visible on Reb Noson's face.

His grandson, Reb Avraham Sternhartz, related that the Seder night was a very trying time for Reb Noson's family. They were never sure that he would make it through the Seder without fainting. Once, while reciting the words "The revelation of the Divine Presence!" he became so filled with emotion and a yearning for God that he actually did faint (*Oral tradition*).

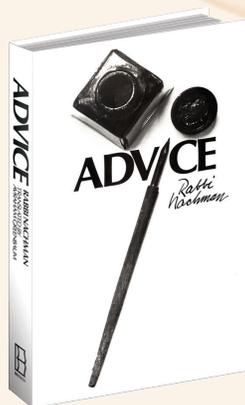
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Rebbe Nachman's daughter Adil lived in Breslov, and the Rebbe would eat in her house on the last day of Pesach. Each year Adil would serve her father two *kneidlach* (matzah balls) with his soup. One time the Rebbe said to her, "In reward for these two *kneidlach*, you will be blessed with two children." After this, Adil always regretted not having honored her distinguished guest with more *kneidlach* (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 33, #43).

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HITBODEDUT. 10. When a person speaks to God and uses every kind of argument and appeal to "conquer" God, then God Himself has great joy and pleasure. He Himself sends words to this person's mouth so that he will be able to "conquer" Him. How else could flesh and blood win a victory against God? It is only because God helps him (*Likutey Moharan I, 124*).



11. When a person speaks to God and pours out his pain and anguish, confessing his sins and grieving at the enormity of what he has done, the Shekhinah Herself rises before God and pours out Her pain and sorrow. For every flaw in the soul of man is also a "flaw" in the Shekhinah. And the Shekhinah will seek to bring the person comfort and devise ways and means of repairing the damage (*ibid. I, 259*).

12. How good it is to pray to God and meditate in the meadows amid the grass and the trees. When a person goes out to the meadows to pray, every blade of grass, every plant and flower enters his prayers and helps him, putting strength and force into his words (*ibid. II, 11*).

13. There is nothing that cannot be accomplished by prayer and entreaty. Set aside one hour every day for this, and the rest of the day be happy. Then you will be truly blessed (*ibid. II, 25*).



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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.