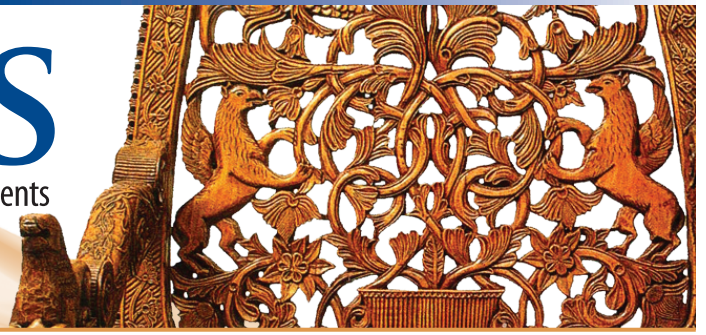


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Leaving the Frat Boys Behind

By Yossi Katz

RECENTLY I READ an abysmal statistic. According to a 2014 PEW Research Center study, the US marriage rate is at a 93-year low! Just about half of the adult population is not married. While there are various opinions seeking to explain why the rate keeps dropping, one of the most popular suggestions is that many young men would prefer to remain in the “frat boy” stage and aren’t at all interested in investing in a serious, demanding and oftentimes difficult relationship. It’s just so much more tempting to have a good time and avoid commitment.

Rebbe Nachman shares an analogy that has a lot to do with this issue:

Sometimes, when people are happy and dance, they grab someone standing outside [the circle] who is depressed and gloomy. Against his will, they bring him into the circle of dancers; against his will, they force him to be happy along with them. It is the same with happiness. When a person is happy, gloom and suffering stand aside.

The Rebbe is describing a popular method used to deal with problems and sadness: *Forget about them.* Allow yourself to be dragged into the circle of fun and joy. The gloominess will remain where it is while you experience happiness. Much of our society has adapted this attitude on various levels. They shy away from dealing with “stuff” and would rather engage in something enjoyable, while leaving their gloom off to the side.

But the Rebbe says this isn’t good enough:

Yet greater still is to gather courage to actually pursue gloom, and to introduce it into the joy, such that the gloom itself turns into joy. A person should transform gloom and all suffering into joy.

Finding contentment in marriage is a lot like having the courage to pursue gloom. Unfortunately, married life isn’t always as glamorous as the wedding that precedes

it. But the skill set that one learns as he or she becomes capable of leading a happy home is priceless.

One of our primary missions and a key to living a fulfilled lifestyle is to recognize God’s great compassion and kindness in even the most mundane and difficult situations. The commitment of marriage gives us the opportunity to become mindful of God at a day-to-day level. Only by learning to see the good in every situation can you successfully lead a happy household. By doing so, you reveal that Godliness exists even at the most basic level.

In our *parashah*, we read about Nadav and Avihu bringing a voluntary incense-offering. They were punished with death, something that seems very severe for two holy priests who were being sincere in their contribution to God. The *Zohar* reveals the fundamental flaw in their judgment that led to their error: They never married!

Now, Nadav and Avihu were not part of some priestly college fraternity. They were actually so committed to cleaving to Godliness that they couldn’t imagine being forced to deal with drudgery of married life. One of the ingredients of the incense is galbanum. While the other ten ingredients are sweet-smelling, galbanum is foul-smelling. Much like the vinegar included in a tasty condiment, true joy cannot be experienced unless it is enhanced by a preceding challenge. As Nadav and Avihu sought to elevate the incense, they came face to face with gloom and sadness, whose spiritual roots are associated with death. Because they were lacking the experience and know-how necessary to elevate these, they were drawn to those spiritual roots and passed away.

God does not want us to live solitary lives on holy mountaintops, but rather seek Him specifically in the mundane and in our life challenges. If we understand this well, and consequently invest the necessary patience and motivation, we have the ability to develop massive spiritual muscles that will serve us well throughout our lives and beyond. Amen!

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 23

An A-to-Z Guide to Life

By Yehudis Golshevsky

AS A CHILD, Rebbe Nachman was powerfully motivated to study Torah. He had access to his father's library, which covered the full spectrum of Jewish teachings from the most revealed to the most concealed. Fired by love and desire to connect with his Creator, the young Rebbe would spend hours studying his father's books.

The product of this early entry into the broad sea of Torah was his work *Sefer HaMidot* (*The Aleph-Bet Book*). Its straightforward aphorisms and concepts are phrased simply and without any pretension, making them accessible to even the simplest of Jews. Yet the greatest scholars have marveled at the encyclopedic knowledge of classic Torah sources that it evidences. It's really a guide to life, literally from A to Z.

The teachings in *Sefer HaMidot* are practical guidelines to the qualities that a Jew needs to foster, and those that he should avoid. They are all rooted in the full range of rabbinic sources – both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the Midrash, and the *Zohar*. And to think that Rebbe Nachman wrote *Sefer HaMidot* before his bar mitzvah!

Rebbe Nachman did not provide actual sources for the aphorisms. For that we have to thank the great Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, who invested precious time and energy in adding numerous sources into his marginalia. It's said that when a visitor saw Rabbi Tzadok poring over the small volume and asked to borrow it so he could see what gripped the great sage to such an extent, the Chassidic giant answered, "How on earth can I loan away the source of my vitality?!"

Once Rebbe Nachman was traveling with his student, Reb Naftali, by coach. When he saw the copy of *Sefer HaMidot* that Reb Naftali held in his hand, the Rebbe exclaimed, "My dear brother and friend! That book is what made me into a Jew!"

It's known that even though the book was completed when Rebbe Nachman was very young, he held onto the small treasure for years. He waited until the time was ripe for its publication, and in the end, Providence arranged for it to make its appearance in the world through the most wondrous of events.

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 55-57

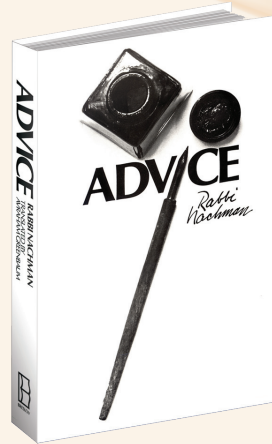
SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HITBODEDUT. 14. It is a good thing to turn the Torah that you learn into prayers (*Likutey Moharan* II, 25; see there for fuller explanation).

15. It is true that weeping and crying are good when you plead and entreat before God. But don't fall into the trap of saying psalms and prayers with the constant thought and expectation that you are going to burst into tears and cry. It will only confuse you and prevent you from concentrating. The most important thing is to say what you are saying honestly and with all your heart (*ibid.* II, 95).

16. Even if you find you are unable to express yourself before God, even if you can say no more than a single word, this is still good. Even if you can say nothing except "Master of the Universe," it is also good. The mere fact that you make an effort, that you prepare yourself to speak, that you feel a longing to speak, all this is very precious in God's eyes. If you are determined and persistent and you make yourself speak before God, in time God will help you and then you will be able to express yourself with words filled with vitality, freshness and grace. Your words will bring blessings down from Heaven and you will attain true and enduring good (*ibid.* II, 25, 100).



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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