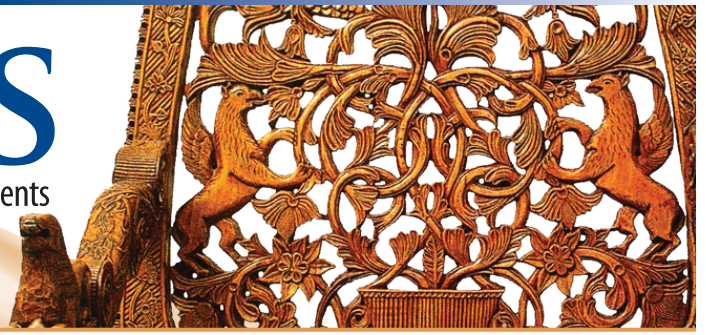


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Made to Measure

By Yossi Katz

HAD THE JEWISH People remained in Egypt even a moment longer, they would have fallen to the rock-bottom 50th level of impurity, from where there could be no hope of spiritual redemption. Therefore God Himself produced an awesome miracle by taking the Jews out at the very last moment. But because of God's direct intervention, the Jews did not leave on their own strength; their spiritual redemption was limited to a very great but also temporary reprieve.

For this reason, the Sefirah period follows Pesach. We count day after day as we ascend the 49 levels of holiness and achieve redemption on our own merit. But what does this mean to us, and how do we do it?

In our world, there are two great but very different types of light: the light of the sun and the light of the moon. The light of the sun is blinding, too powerful for our eyes to focus on. This is symbolic of God's light which permeates the entire creation—it is so powerful that if one were to partake of it, its bliss would cause one to lose all sense of self. At the same time, we can still experience the light of the sun by looking at the moon. Its light is not direct but reflected, and therefore the moon can act like a lens, constricting the sunlight so we can stare directly at it and enjoy it.

The idea of Sefirah is to partake of God's light in a measured and constricted way so we can grow ever closer to God. As we read in the Sefirah prayer, each day has a specific characteristic associated with it. Characteristics define behavior in very measured ways. When we serve God through emulating His characteristic associated with a specific Sefirah day, we create the vessel necessary to absorb the light that shines down specific to this day.

The Arizal explains that the world was created in seven days, each day being a measure of time that is also associated with a certain characteristic. Furthermore, each day can be broken down into seven sections, in which each of these characteristics is played out. Therefore there are 49 types of time that we experience during a complete week.

But how can we ever know enough to emulate God's characteristics at the appropriate time in order to build the vessels capable of holding the corresponding light?

Reb Noson tells us how. During the Sefirah period, God directs our every experience in a way that forces us to face many "constrictions" or setbacks—such as waking up late, not feeling well, or when something just came up, etc. By serving Him in whatever capacity we can despite these setbacks, we create the vessels capable of absorbing His light. By just accepting the situation and doing whatever we can, our actions will reflect the characteristic we are supposed to be working on.

For example, if circumstances inhibit a person from praying with proper intention, he might learn extra Torah or do acts of kindness. This creates the lens by which one can then look at God's corresponding light in a measured way, and partake of it.

Often we are inspired and want to run towards spiritual greatness, assuming we can stare right at God's great light. But God, knowing we wouldn't be able to retain our free will and identity, pushes back, thereby giving us the opportunities to grow in a measured way and create the vessels to hold the light ourselves. This is the secret to mastering achievable spiritual freedom. By experiencing all 49 possible setbacks and constrictions, and finding God in different ways because of them, we can continually grow until we are great enough to partake of the greatest light of all: the revelation of the Torah at Sinai and the 50th gate of holiness. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Pikudim 4

Walking in Faith

PEOPLE WHO KNEW R' Yitzchok Breiter (1886-1943?) described his magnetic effect on people. He had a magical power of speech, and his words directly entered the hearts of all who came in contact with him.

Yet despite his penetrating wisdom, he conducted himself with the utmost simplicity in his studies and devotions. He spent much time in *hitbodedut* (secluded meditation and prayer), gathering a circle around him who never let a day go by without this practice. With all R' Yitzchok's breadth of Torah learning, his profound knowledge of Breslov literature, and his capacity to arouse and fire his followers, he never presented himself as anything other than their friend and equal, and they knew him simply as Yitzchok.

The intensity of R' Yitzchok's faith and trust in God was summed up by R' Avraham b'Reb Nachman (1849-1918), leader of the Breslover Chassidim in Uman: "R' Yitzchok walks in faith like someone walking through a most amazing garden."

It once happened that R' Yitzchok was arrested by the Polish authorities on trumped-up charges, together with a neighbor. In the anti-Semitic climate of Poland, such arrests were not infrequent. As they were being taken into custody, their hands were chained. R' Yitzchok saw that his neighbor was depressed. "Why are you sad?" he asked. "Imagine if they bedecked you with chains of gold. Would that be a reason to get depressed?"

R' Yitzchok was sentenced to five years in prison. When he heard the verdict, he rose to his feet and joyously made the blessing over bad tidings, "Blessed are You...the True Judge." In the prison, the authorities wanted to shave off all the prisoners' beards. R' Yitzchok prayed fervently to God not to let them touch his beard. Just as the prison barber was finishing the prisoner before R' Yitzchok, the razor broke and he was unable to continue. Within a few days, the Russians occupied that part of Poland and released all the prisoners.

In World War II, when the Nazi persecutors overran Poland, R' Yitzchok was one of the leading figures in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the early 1940s he was deported to the Treblinka concentration camp, where he lost his life in the gas chamber in sanctification of the Name of God.

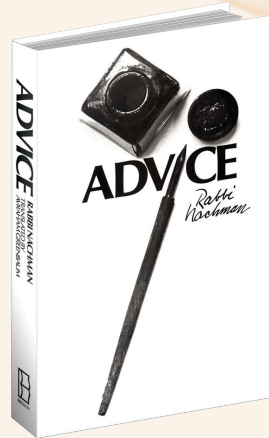
From the Introduction to "Seven Pillars of Faith"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HITBODEDUT. 17. Whenever you say psalms and other prayers or rise to say *Tikkun Chatzot*, you should endeavor to find *yourself* in the words of the prayers. The Rebbe had truly extraordinary things to say about this (*Likutey Moharan II*, 101).

18. Even when you feel your heart is not in what you are saying, don't let this discourage you. Persevere, and you will usually find that in the end your heart will be aroused and the words will flow from you with genuine fervor. Speech has tremendous power to arouse a person's heart. And even if the days and years pass by and you think that all your words and meditation have accomplished nothing, don't let yourself be thrown off course. The words have left their mark.



It is the same as when water is dripping onto a stone. It may seem as though mere water is incapable of having any effect at all on the hard stone. Certainly the effects of the water are not visible. But if the water continues dripping for a long time without interruption, you can see for yourself that it will wear a hollow in the stone. The same is true of the heart, even when the heart is as hard as stone. The words and the prayers may all appear to have no effect. But with the passing of many days and years, the heart will be worn away by the words.



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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.