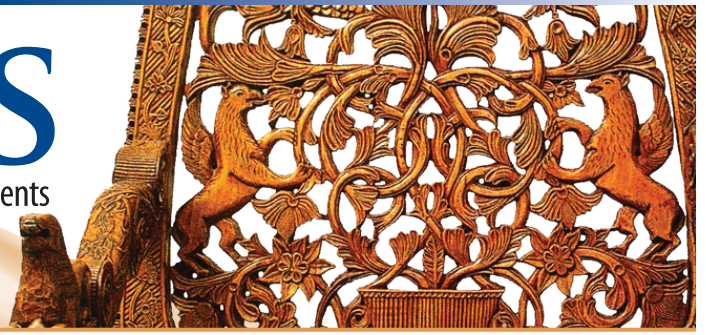


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Higher Calling

By Yossi Katz

“**THE THINGS THAT** make me different are the things that make me.” – A. A. Milne

Individuality is one of life’s most prized virtues. Imagine how boring everything would be if everyone were the same. A world of clones would not even be worth living in; after all, what would distinguish us from others while leaving room for our own existence? Variety creates the conditions for us to appreciate the gift of life.

This concept is true of the entire creation. Whereas before Creation, everything was one, God made room for each of us to come into existence. This can be compared to two sides. The right side is straight – it represents God’s Oneness, and there is no room for anything else but Him. The left side is diverse and creative. There are many choices and distinctions, but there is also the potential for lies and fabrications.

As beautiful as our individuality is, the left side by its very nature gives way to freedom of choice and the possibility of being completely blinded from the Source of life. We are surrounded by a society in which falsehood is ever so prominent and the choices are easily accessible and endless. How can we stay focused? How can we gain access to the right side, the Source of life itself, the One and Only God?

Our existence in this world can be compared to the life of a slave. We are born into an imperfect and impoverished, limited state. But we want to experience something endlessly higher and more meaningful. The Torah therefore commands the slave to be circumcised.

Man was created in the image of God. His body represents a perfect figure, but he is born with one

extra part, the foreskin that must be removed by way of circumcision. The foreskin serves no purpose other than representing this world’s potential for multiplicity and, subsequently, falsehood. Therefore, it must be removed. By doing so, the slave reaches a higher calling and becomes connected to God’s Oneness. For this reason, Jewish law dictates that the slave must refrain from violating the Torah’s negative commandments.

Just as we circumcise the extraneous foreskin, Rebbe Nachman teaches that when we speak words of truth, we also become elevated and are able to restore and reconnect this world of multiplicity to its origin of Oneness. The veil of falsehood is removed from our eyes, and we can finally experience the Essence of Creation.

Yet the Torah forbids freeing the newly-elevated slave. “You shall hold onto them as an inheritance for your children after you, as acquired property, and they shall serve you forever” (Leviticus 25:46). Why? Now that he has been elevated from his base slave state, shouldn’t he be allowed to live a life of freedom, a life of spiritual ecstasy? Why must he remain enslaved?

God created this world in its current state, and wishes it to remain this way. It is our job to rise up, to elevate our lives and reconnect with God’s Oneness. In order for this to happen, while at the same time maintaining the world’s existence, we must all experience constant states of highs and lows. This is our Master’s wish and desire. In His great kindness, He knows it is not desirable for us to be completely free. However, by knowing that this is for our ultimate benefit, we can gain the patience and resolve to weather the ups and downs and serve our Master and Father with dedication and love. We can know what this world is all about, and realize that we are not really slaves at all.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Avadim 2

Spiritual Healing

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE A MAN who was indifferent about serving God attended one of the Maggid of Dubno's fiery sermons. Despite the Maggid's inspiring words, this man still felt completely unmoved. Boldly, in front of a crowd of enthusiastic listeners, he challenged the Maggid to explain why he couldn't reach him, too.

Characteristically, the Maggid answered with an original parable:

There was once a villager who visited the big city for the first time. As he was taking in its wonders, he saw a blacksmith using a bellows to fan his fire. In his simplicity, the villager figured that the bellows was actually generating the flame, and resolved to buy it from the blacksmith at any price. "How wonderful it would be to never have to struggle to build a fire again!" he rejoiced.

When he arrived home, he called all of the villagers together for a demonstration. To his chagrin, after wearing himself out pumping the bellows, all he got out of it was air. Although he protested that it really could produce a flame, he was a laughingstock in the eyes of all his neighbors.

He returned to the city and angrily confronted the blacksmith. "Why did you trick me? I tried to use this to make a fire and it was useless!"

The blacksmith was perplexed. "You mean that the bellows didn't set your live coal aflame?"

The simple villager gaped. "What live coal?"

"You fool!" the blacksmith roared. "If there is no spark, how did you expect the bellows to fan it into fire? You need a spark to work with!"

The Maggid explained, "The same is true regarding my sermon. Like a bellows, I fan the Jewish spark into a roaring flame. But one who has no spark will not be moved by my words in the slightest. It is only possible to fan a flame where there is a spark!"

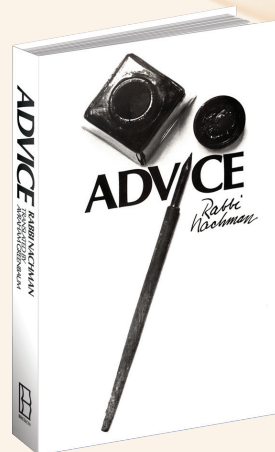
But when this story was told to Reb Noson, he explained that this is not the Breslov approach. "This is not true at all. Every Jew has a spark, no matter what he thinks or feels. But one must understand how to discover that hidden spark and blow it into a flame!"

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh V:85

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

ENCOURAGEMENT. 3. It is a good thing for friends who are attached to the Tzaddikim to give encouragement to each other. The main source of strength they have to draw on is the Tzaddik himself: his power is so great that he can draw up even the most damaged soul, even a soul that has not yet begun to emerge from the profane to the holy by a single hairsbreadth. The thought that the Tzaddik can renew such a soul should



give everyone a feeling of encouragement. However low a person's level may be and no matter what he may have been through, there is genuine hope for him so long as he attaches himself to the Tzaddik (Likutey Moharan I, 13).

4. God takes pride even in the most insignificant Jew, even in the sinners of Israel, so long as they go by the name Jew. There is a special pride which God takes in each individual Jew. One should therefore never despair of God's help regardless of any wrong one may have done. God's love for him will never cease, and he can still return to God. The main thing is to be attached to the Tzaddik and his followers, because they possess the ability to uncover the goodness and glory which is present even in the worst people and return everything to God (ibid. I, 17).



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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.