

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Promise of Victory

By Yossi Katz

ARE YOU HAPPY with your life? Do you feel like you've always made the right choices and are proud of everything you've done? If you could turn back the clock, would you do everything the same way? Or maybe you wouldn't mind getting a fresh start or at least a partial reset?

Preparing for Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment, involves a great deal of introspection. (If you haven't started yet, now may be a good time!) Naturally, as we think back and remember our deeds (or misdeeds), many of these questions nag at us and prey on our conscience. Interestingly, the process described in this week's *parashah* is extremely relevant.

When the Holy Temple stood, farmers in Israel would make a special trip to Jerusalem each year. They would bring along their "first fruits," or *bikkurim*, which they placed in a basket to present to the Kohen. Each farmer would declare:

"An Aramean tried to do destroy my father. He descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a large, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians treated us cruelly and harmed us, and they imposed harsh labor upon us... HaShem heard our voice and saw our pain, our toil and our oppression. He took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great awe, with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

As the farmer presented his bounty, he reflected on how he had arrived at this special destination. The Aramean is Laban, who continually switched Jacob's wages and tried to harm him. However, ultimately, not only did Laban fail, but Jacob was able to marry Laban's two precious daughters who would give birth to the "perfect offspring," the holy twelve tribes. Similarly, we were exiled in Egypt as slaves, small in number, but were redeemed as a great nation, populous and wealthy.

The story of our forefathers is the story of our lives, too. The events that we read about in the Torah simultaneously

take place in the spiritual worlds. Thus, the ploys of Laban or Pharaoh are the work of the forces of evil seeking to destroy our faith and trust in the Oneness of God. We face these very same threats in our daily lives, whether they are directed at us by those around us, or by our own negative thoughts. Our daily battles to connect our every action and experience to Godliness parallel the events in the Torah. And just as Jacob and Moses were victorious, so too, in the end, we will be victorious.

The Midrash explains that the Torah begins with the word *Bereishit* ("In the beginning" or "At first") because the world was created for the purpose of *reishit* (first). The first fruits are one of the things the Midrash calls "first" (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4). The first fruits teach us that living is really all about making new beginnings.

Rebbe Nachman says that every day is an entirely new creation. God knew before creating the world that man would err; we are therefore taught that *teshuvah* (repentance) preceded the creation of the world. The purpose of creation is for us to begin again and again. We can do this successfully by remembering that yes, yesterday might have been rough, but just as in the stories of the Torah, God will bring about our ultimate salvation.

Rebbe Nachman says that even if someone transgressed the entire Torah thousands of times, there is still hope! It is our job to strengthen our faith, start afresh, and wait for the time when we, too, will experience our redemption. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot Basar BeChalav 4:13

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Look for a positive side to everything. If you cannot find one, then just have faith in God's lovingkindness that everything is indeed for the good. (*Letter #84*)

Dance of a Lifetime

By Yehudis Golshevsky

IN TEPLIK THERE lived a man named Feivel who was a sincere servant of God. Without fail, he would get up every night at midnight to recite the *Tikkun Chatzot* and mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple. The sad state of the world and the all discord and dismay that fill it are a direct consequence of the loss of the Temple and the deep connection with God that once gave it vitality.

After reciting *Tikkun Chatzot*, Feivel would feel so happy that he would immediately begin to dance with joy. He would sing with great passion, “*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu!* — How fortunate are we, how pleasant our portion!”

People thought he was strange for rejoicing so much in doing *mitzvot* and because he took such delight in the simple fact of his Jewishness. As a mark of their derision, they started to call him “Feivel Ashreinu.”

When Reb Noson would visit Teplik, Feivel always greeted him joyously. One time, however, Feivel failed to meet Reb Noson when he arrived.

When Reb Noson asked the locals, “Where is Feivel?” the townspeople wondered which Feivel he meant. When he made clear who he meant, they said in a dismissive tone, “Oh, him? Since you were here last, ‘Feivel Ashreinu’ passed away.”

Taking note of their disrespectful attitude, Reb Noson spoke to them sharply. “One of the punishments of the Next World, the experience that is called *Olam HaTohu*, is that a person is forced to repeat the acts that he did in this world for a seemingly endless time. Generally, this is very humiliating, because after a person is no longer blinded by his this-worldly self-interest, the repetition brings home just how exceedingly foolish those actions really were. Most of us spend almost all of our time without having a sense of how privileged we are to be part of the Jewish people and be able to perform *mitzvot*.”

“So why should you denigrate Reb Feivel? Do you really think that he will be ashamed in the Next World when he is dancing ecstatically and singing, ‘*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu!*?’”

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:786

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

157. I heard that the Rebbe once said he had revealed many lessons related to his illness. In fact, after his return from Lemberg (Lvov), he spoke about the lungs in almost every lesson he gave, since he was suffering from tuberculosis – a lung disease – may God spare us. The Rebbe said that in light of the amount of lessons he had given on this topic, he should have been healed already. The fault, however, was his audience's lack of faith – their faith was not that strong.



158. The Rebbe told us, “You think that everything comes at once. This is far from the truth. You must work and toil before you can achieve any good quality [devotion].” Many times, when his unique qualities were mentioned, the Rebbe would say, “But I struggled very much for it. I fasted very much.”

159. Once Rebbe complained to me, “How is one worthy of being a Jew?”

I stood there dumbfounded. I knew the Rebbe's greatness and the unimaginable extent of his devotions. Yet here he felt as if he had not yet begun. The Rebbe said, “When I began serving God, I had no idea I would achieve what I did. There are things I know now that I did not even realize existed. Therefore I did not have any concept of what to strive for. But the same is still true. Who knows what there is still to comprehend, what understanding there is still to perceive?”



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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.