

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Back to “Normal”

By Yossi Katz

HOW WAS YOUR Yom Tov? Mine was wonderful. First I experienced the awesome spiritual heights of being in Uman for Rosh HaShanah, then the solemn upliftedness of the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, and then eight joyous days together with my family in the sukkah.

But the Sunday after was very difficult. Besides all the schlepping, like taking down the sukkah and cleaning up after Yom Tov, life was rapidly returning to “normal.” Granted, I am fortunate enough to work for BRI and spend my time doing my best to share the Rebbe’s Torah with the masses; nevertheless, my job is as pressured and stressful as any other. I have deadlines to make, financial obligations to keep, and a multitude of issues always certain to spring up. This got me wondering: Is Tishrei (the current month of festivals) a kind of once-a-year Jewish Oktoberfest, or does its placement at the start of the year indicate its crucial relevance and influence?

As difficult as it is to build a sukkah, Noah’s Ark was a far greater feat. For 120 years, Noah toiled at building this massive structure. Why was he asked to build something for so long? Picture your neighbor working around the clock, erecting a giant tower. Would your curiosity not overcome you to ask, “What in the world are you doing?” God gave Noah a massive building project in order to make headlines. This would guarantee that he be swamped with interviews and have ample opportunity to encourage mankind to do *teshuvah*.

The *Zohar* (*Hashmatot*, *Bereishit* 254b) teaches that after the flood, Noah witnessed the destruction of the world and began to cry. He said, “Master of the world, You are called compassionate. Why were You not compassionate for Your creation?” God rebuked him, “You foolish shepherd! Now you say this?” For even after toiling 120 years, Noah was not able to bring even one Jew back to God. It wasn’t that Noah was lacking in piety. Quite the opposite – he was a tremendous Tzaddik. But he was lacking in his ability to

perceive God’s absolute compassion. It was therefore most fitting that he be saved by being sealed in a box. Noah could not have remained on earth, for he was unable to relate to those who had fallen away from God and holiness. He could exist only in an artificial spiritual environment. The *Zohar* (*Tikkun* #21, p. 54) thus compares the Ark to Yom Kippur, and points out that the Ark came to rest during the seventh month – Tishrei!

Over the past Tishrei, we were blessed to be engaged in one spiritual endeavor after another. Hopefully, we became more aware of our connection to God and the existence and abilities of our special *neshamot* (souls). However, just as we left our Jewish homes, the pinnacle of holiness, for the outdoorsiness of the sukkah, so too, we must leave behind the High Holidays season and rejoin “normal” life. Yet the sukkah taught us a tremendous lesson: Just like its *sechach*-roof, God is hovering over us always. His compassion is never-ending.

We have proven that we can ascend to great heights, and that we are active members of God’s great nation, but can we also go beyond Noah? Can we serve God when He is hidden? When we begin to grasp His true greatness and compassion, we can begin to truly serve Him in whatever situation we find ourselves. God’s greatest desire is not for us to have a relationship for a month or two a year, but to get to know Him every day, in every facet of our lives. This is the challenge and greatness of every Jew. May we all merit a joyous year of true closeness with God. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Shabbat 7

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



It is inevitable that everyone will come up against many problems which are impossible to foresee. We have to accept them all with love and know that everything that happens to us is all for our good. (*Letter #151*)

Remedy for Pride

By Yehudis Golshevsky

“You can overcome your arrogance by praying for someone else”

– *Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*

R’ YUDEL, ONE of the Rebbe’s close students, wondered about this teaching. It seems like the opposite should be true. Wouldn’t praying for my friend feed my ego and make me feel even more prideful? After all, aren’t my prayers answered because I’m important?

Rebbe Nachman explained his teaching with a parable:

Once there was a prince who angered his father, the king. When the king’s anger faded, the prince asked his pardon, and it was readily granted. After a while, though, the prince again acted in a way that upset his father. Yet again, the king graciously pardoned his beloved son. But when this pattern continued to repeat itself, the king lost his appetite for it. How could he stop the cycle and ensure that the prince would not appease him once his anger faded? He decided to appoint a minister to prevent his son from approaching him to ask forgiveness.

Once again, the prince tried to reconcile with the king in the usual manner. But this time he was rebuffed by the minister. He again tried to get to his father, but was again prevented. The minister conscientiously foiled every effort to see the king.

Not surprisingly, the prince was very pained by this, and so was the king.

The minister began to consider the matter. He could not allow the prince to see the king, since he was duty-bound to keep him away. But how could he be a party to such a painful estrangement? There must be a way to appease the king, he reasoned.

Finally the minister understood that it was up to him to appease the king on the prince’s behalf. He approached the king and described the great pain his son suffered by being kept at a distance. The king immediately pardoned his son.

Rebbe Nachman explained, “Our Sages say that every person must say, ‘The world was created for me.’ This means that we are responsible for what the world lacks. Our prayers help our friends only if we’re aware that our sins are what prevent them from receiving what they need. This meditation will instill a deep sense of humility, and all arrogance will vanish.”

Based on Peulat HaTzaddik 955-958

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l

164. The Rebbe had lodgings in Uman, but his landlord had the right to enter at will. Once the landlord entered the Rebbe’s room without warning and found him lying prostrate on the floor, stretched out in prayer. The Rebbe was so weak and close to death at the time that his very life was a miracle. But still he maintained his devotions, serving God with absolute simplicity. He continued like this until the end of his life, when he was taken away in peace to the highest levels. Happy is he.



165. Whenever his high spiritual level was mentioned, the Rebbe would say, “But I worked very hard for all this. I struggled very much. I endured many fasts.”

The Rebbe once spoke to one of us about his attainments. He seemed to boast of his high level and deep perception just like one taunts another and tries to make him jealous of some mundane achievement. The other man replied to the Rebbe, “How can I achieve this? Who is worthy of attaining such a high level? Surely only one with a lofty soul like yours!”

The Rebbe seemed very irritated and answered, “This is the trouble. You think that tzaddikim attain greatness merely because they have a very great soul. This is absolutely wrong! Any person can attain my level and become just like me. All it takes is true devotion and effort.”



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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.