

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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One Good Eye

By Yossi Katz

IT WAS FINALLY Friday afternoon, almost time for Shabbat and some long overdue rest. Jerry had returned from a long overseas business trip and hadn't been at his familiar seat in shul for several weeks. As the men filed in for the *Minchah* service, Jerry was greeted by the Rabbi with a hearty "*Shalom Aleichem*."

Jerry tried to pray properly, but his mind wasn't at ease, there was just so much catching up to do. He pictured all the places he had been to and the people he had met. Before he knew it, he was taking three steps back as he completed the *Amidah* prayer. Once again, Jerry heard the Rabbi wishing him, "*Shalom Aleichem*."

"Huh?" Jerry thought to himself, staring at the Rabbi. The Rabbi whispered, "True, I welcomed you back from your first overseas trip, but I wanted to welcome you back from this last trip as well!"

We often live our lives subconsciously feeling, "I am the ultimate example of a religious hypocrite." We think, "Maybe I prayed with some intensity and concentration this morning, but already this afternoon my mind was wandering and distant from the words of the siddur." Or, "I may have seen the good points in my friend, spouse or business associate yesterday, but today they couldn't do anything right. I am back to being such a negative person."

We quickly become convinced that we haven't made any progress, and that whatever measure of good we thought we'd accomplished is either nonexistent or wiped out by now. But is this true? We have all been taught that two wrongs don't make a right, but what about the opposite? Am I erasing the good deed I've done by later doing something that implies the opposite? If my future behavior isn't at the higher standard of my earlier actions, does that mean I was insincere and have only been deluding myself until now?

Well, thankfully, God already answered this question for us! Jewish sources teach that the entire creation and

history of civilization was only a prelude for the most important event ever. This event was so great that it was actually the *raison d'être* for everything that came before it. This event was the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

One could assume that the Jewish People had to be spiritually worthy in order to receive this ultimate gift. Certainly they had to be completely sincere and dedicated to following what was written in the Torah. And yet God says about the Jewish People at Sinai, "You have captured My heart with *one* of your eyes" (Song of Songs 4:9). Why only one? Because the other eye was already looking at the Golden Calf, waiting for the moment it could be worshipped! (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:55).

Surely there couldn't be a greater hypocrisy than this. At the very giving of the Torah, there were elements of our nation who already had their eye on defiling all that was written. As our Sages teach, "Idol worship is equivalent to transgressing the entire Torah" (*Shevuot* 29a). And yet God was drawn toward us because of our one good eye!

Good is true and eternal. Nothing I do will ever negate the value and absolute purity of a good deed, thought or desire. Every bit of good that I do is forever cherished by God and safeguarded for my eternal reward. Now is not the time to despair, but to strengthen myself and start again, because whatever good I do from now on remains with me always!

Based on Sichot HaRan (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom) #123

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

God does not desire the existence of this world for the sake of its vanities and futile pursuits; these exist only to give man free will. What God really desires is each good movement and each good point that every Jew manages to catch each day, and which the true tzaddikim refine and elevate and build into wondrous, awesome edifices. (Letter #214)



The Merit of a Mitzvah

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB AHARON OF KIBLITCH had been feeling fine when, suddenly, he fell ill. Fever and weakness quickly followed, and his health began to fail. Reb Aharon's situation deteriorated so rapidly that his family was afraid it would soon be the end, and so did everyone else who saw him. Many heartfelt prayers were offered, but none seemed to help. His life-force continued to ebb until it became obvious that the end was near.

Reb Aharon had instructed his household and his entire family—including his son-in-law, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender—to gather round and prepare for his imminent demise. His death throes began and the family quickly summoned the burial society. These dedicated volunteers quickly left their respective jobs and came to guide Reb Aharon's final moments, as was their privilege and duty.

Strangely, the moment they walked into the room, Reb Aharon seemed to stabilize. After a short time, his final struggle abated and the Angel of Death seemed to retreat from the room. This was so unusual that the members of the burial society remained to observe his condition. As the color returned to Reb Aharon's face and he relaxed into restful sleep, the burial society felt that they could leave him to recover.

By the very next day, Reb Aharon was well enough to walk around.

Everyone was astounded at his amazing recovery and they wondered what had caused it. One of the members of the burial society spoke up. "Obviously, we cannot know the mysterious ways of Heaven. But I think I may have an idea as to why he began healing the moment we entered the room.

"As you know, I am a wagon driver by trade. What you probably don't know is that after my wedding, I didn't have any way to support myself and my young bride. I approached Reb Aharon and poured out my heart to him, explaining that if I only had a horse and wagon, I thought I could make a decent living.

"Reb Aharon took me around town and helped me collect the entire sum I needed to get started earning a living. I believe that the moment I entered the room, the merit of this great mitzvah was aroused and sparked his rapid recovery."

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh, IV:341

SIDEPATH

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

198. When I returned from Berdichev after Chanukah in the winter of 5570/1810, the Rebbe told me that he had a story to tell. He said, "This tale has been told only once before, and this was before Solomon's Temple was built. The only ones who understood it were the prophet who told it and the one to whom it was told. Even the other prophets could not fathom it.

"Although this story has already been told once, it is now a totally new concept. Many things have changed since it was last told. It was told once before in accordance with that time, but now it must be told in accordance with the present. This story has removed any questions I might have had about what we are doing. At first, I found it very difficult to understand why we are not respected in this world. But this story answered any question I might have had."



The Rebbe was prepared to tell the story, but events intervened and we were not worthy of hearing it.

199. The Rebbe said, "No one can understand the book [*Likutey Moharan*] unless he knows each lesson forwards and backwards.

200. He said, "All my teachings are introductions."

201. The Rebbe said that every one of his lessons can be applied to the entire Bible and Oral Torah [that is, the entire literature of the Talmud and Midrash].



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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.