

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI • 5775 • VOL. 5 NO. 29

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Every Man a Slave

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

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

Every day and every moment, there are wonders upon wonders. Since God renews [the world] continually, there is a phenomenon whereby everything changes into good. If you cannot see and understand this, at least believe in it. (Letter #12)



Temper, Temper

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN REB NOSON heard that his son was having a hard time controlling his temper, he gently encouraged him, “My dear son, for God’s sake, have mercy on yourself and on your family, and refrain from acting out in anger. If you don’t let anything anger or irritate you, you will be happy in this world and in the next!”

“Anger and resentment can cause so much damage, may God protect us. Our Sages teach that the furious person gains nothing from his temper, other than feeling overwrought. Any benefit that one hopes to gain through anger could have been achieved much more effectively through calm discussion. As the verse states, “The words of the wise, when spoken calmly, are heard.”

Rebbe Nachman gave a powerful example of the benefit of finding workable strategies for avoiding anger.

One cold winter day, a Breslover chassid paid Rebbe Nachman a visit. He was surprised to be met by the acrid smell of smoke billowing through the open front door. He ran into the house and saw that the wood in the potbellied stove desperately needed tending, but the housemaid hadn’t done it. He raised a ruckus and opened some windows. Then he explained to the young girl just how dangerous her daydreaming could have been. After that, he approached the Rebbe’s room.

Upon entering, it became clear that this room, too, had been filled with smoke just moments before. The chassid wondered aloud why the Rebbe had not brought the housemaid’s oversight to her attention. Was there some kind of deep reason behind his inaction?

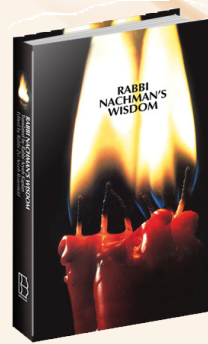
Rebbe Nachman answered patiently, “The helper isn’t that attentive and it often takes a few times to get her to do her job. It’s human nature that the first time one asks a hired worker to do what is obviously her job and should require no reminders, one still uses a pleasant tone of voice. The second time, one raises his voice. The third time, one gets angry. I therefore ignore all of her slip-ups. It is so much better to remain silent from the outset!”

Based on Alim LiTerufah #446; Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:107

SIDEPATH

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

231. One of the Rebbe’s followers asked him the difference between depression and a broken heart. The Rebbe answered, “When you have a broken heart, you can be standing in a crowd and still turn around and say, *‘Ribono shel Olam (Master of the World) ...’*”



The Rebbe then raised his hands with great emotion and said, *“Ribono shel Olam ...”*

232. This same man told me that he wanted to speak to the Rebbe many times, but could not open his mouth when he was with him. One Friday afternoon when he was attending the Rebbe, he decided that he would speak to the Rebbe right away, but was unable to open his mouth.

As the Rebbe was dressing after his bath, he asked the man to pass him his shoes. As the man handed over the shoes, the Rebbe said, “Make a habit of speaking to God. Then you will also be able to speak to me.” The man followed this advice and was able to speak to the Rebbe. However, he still found it very difficult to express himself.

The Rebbe said, “A warrior girded his loins to overcome a mighty wall. When he came to the gate, he found it blocked by a spider web. Can you imagine anything more foolish than retreating because of a spider web blocking your path? The main thing is speech. Use it and you will win every battle. You can meditate in thought, but the most important thing is to express it in speech.”



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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.