

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Great Fall of a Great Man

By Yossi Katz

“How could he be wrong? Isn't he a Rabbi?” There are various versions of the same question, usually revolving around the greatness of the individual and the disparity between his status and his actions. We assume that since someone has achieved a measure of prominence, his actions should reflect his outstanding level. However, the biblical figure Korach completely invalidates this argument.

Korach was no ordinary fellow. He was the leading Levite, a close relative of Moses, a tremendously clever fellow, and enormously wealthy. He was so great that he was followed by 250 members of the Sanhedrin. Yet Korach openly rebelled against Moses, who was doing nothing other than following the directive of God. How could Korach fall so low? How could a Rabbi be so wrong?

Spiritual growth is like arm-wrestling. The more you press forward, the greater the resistance you encounter. In order to rise from one spiritual level to the next, the *dinim* associated with the new level must first be mitigated. *Dinim* are harsh judgments; they are the protective forces maintaining the balance of good and evil. These forces challenge you to prove that you are sufficiently worthy of this new level. If you want to claim it, you must prove your resilience.

The Jewish people had achieved universal prophecy at Mount Sinai. Each person heard God speak to them directly. Korach therefore claimed, “The entire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's community?” (Numbers 16:3). Korach was arguing, “Haven't we all made it?”

Korach's line of reasoning was that the mitzvahs are a rational device. They are building blocks that can be used in a logical way to attain what one wants to achieve spiritually. In his mind, Korach had mastered the Torah just like Moses, and his greatness was a fait accompli. Because Korach truly was at a mighty level, the *dinim* at that level were enormous. They espoused his greatness, and his ego ultimately got the best of him. He did not manage to conquer them.

Korach challenged, “If a *tallit* is made completely out of *tekheilet* threads, does it require *tzitzit*? Since a single strand of *tekheilet* on the *tzitzit* is sufficient for the mitzvah, shouldn't an entire garment made of *tekheilet* be exempt from *tzitzit*?” (Rashi on Numbers 16:1). The answer is a resounding no! The mitzvahs are not logical devices; we cannot put human limitations on them. When we are privileged to fulfill a mitzvah, we are connecting with the highest place. Just as God is infinite, so are His Torah and mitzvahs. There are immeasurable levels to reach, and yet God is completely connected to us at each level.

If we have achieved a certain spiritual goal, such as praying with intensity, we shouldn't be deceived into thinking we have mastered the skill. As we continue to grow in the art of prayer, we will be challenged at every level. We have to be ready for this and push onwards. We have to display utter humility and sincerity. Yes, we connected with God at our new level, but there are many higher levels of connection.

Korach continued, “The minimum area of a leprous mark to be deemed impure is about one square centimeter. However, if the leprous mark spreads to the entire body, it is a sign of purity. How can this be?” (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:3). Again, his argument was incorrect. Just as we connected to God at the higher level, so does He exist at the lowest level. Sometimes, only when we hit rock bottom can we reconnect and move ahead. Mitzvahs are beyond our comprehension, they are one with God. It is our job to humbly and respectfully seek God from wherever we are. In this way, we will eventually reach our goal. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 4

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Our principal concern is never to let the words of the Torah grow old for us... The words of Torah should be absolutely new to us every day. (Letter #279)

The Faithful Chassid

THE BRESLOV MOVEMENT survived and thrived in Communist Russia due to the bravery and self-sacrifice of its chassidim. We cannot fathom the pressures and persecution that these men and women endured to keep their faith alive and follow Rebbe Nachman's teachings, but endure them they did, keeping the Rebbe's flame burning through the most difficult times.

The story of R' Naftali Tzvi Dubinski is a case in point. He came to Uman at the age of 17 and joined R' Baruch Getche's group of *ovdim* (devotees) who spent their nights in *hitbodedut*, their mornings in prayer, and their days in Torah study.

R' Naftali Tzvi's wife died in childbirth, leaving him with one son, Yaakov. In 1937, R' Naftali Tzvi was arrested and sentenced to eight years in a Siberian slave labor camp for the "crime" of convincing a Jewish boy to stop working on Shabbat. Completely isolated during this period, he had no idea what happened to his six-year-old son during World War II.

In fact, his son was being raised by R' Yochanan Galant, a joyous and warm-hearted Jew who had no children of his own. R' Yochanan raised young Yaakov to be God-fearing and, with tremendous self-sacrifice, kept him out of the anti-religious Soviet school system. In honor of his adoptive father, Yaakov changed his last name to Galant.

Following his release from Siberia, R' Naftali Tzvi moved to Prunz. He was only reunited with his son in 1954, when they met in Uman for Rosh HaShanah. At that point, his son was in his early 20s and married. R' Naftali Tzvi emigrated to Israel in 1971 at the same time as his son and grandchildren.

R' Naftali Tzvi may have lost his chance to raise a family, but he did not lose his faith in God. In Jerusalem, he would often go up to the roof of the Breslov synagogue in Mea Shearim for *hitbodedut*. One day, the wife of R' Nachman Strakes heard someone crying out to God from the roof and commented that that was exactly the way R' Naftali Tzvi used to cry out in Uman – not realizing that R' Naftali Tzvi had arrived in Israel and was the one she was hearing!

From "Against All Odds" by Gedaliah Fleer

SIDEPATH

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

241. The Rebbe was particularly opposed to those who accepted posts as teachers in cities far from their homes. He spoke of them in the most derogatory terms, saying, "To me, a man who takes a teaching post away from home is like a Canaanite maidservant."



242. The Rebbe spoke of the concept of the evil eye: There is power in a glance. If an evil thought accompanies this glance, it can reach another and harm him. The specific remedy for an evil eye is to smoke the fin of a fish. The Hebrew word for fin is *SNaPIR*. Turn the letters into numbers and the *gematria* gives you *RA AYIN*, the evil eye.

243. The Rebbe once told a man who had a sickness in his family to rise before daylight and recite the entire Song of Songs. "Every remedy in the world is contained in the Song of Songs." The man did this, and his relative regained his health.

244. The Rebbe told one of his disciples, "Some people serve God, but He does not show them their accomplishments during their lifetime. This is only revealed to them after death, in the World to Come."

The Rebbe said this by way of encouragement so that the man would not fall down in his own eyes. He had spent many years serving God and had not seen any achievement. Therefore the Rebbe told him that some people have this revealed to them only after death.



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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.