

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT RE'EH • 5775 • VOL. 5 NO. 42

breslov.org/pathways



Shame On Me!

By Yossi Katz

IT'S THAT TIME of year again: National Teshuvah Month, aka Chodesh Elul. In “honor” of this special time of year, Breslover Chassidim customarily study Lesson #6 of Rebbe Nachman's *Likutey Moharan*. I highly recommend it, as it provides the necessary framework to achieve a real and productive *teshuvah*.

My own recollection of this time period while at yeshivah was of a frightful period in which we were under immense pressure to cram in the perfect month of religious achievement in order to “stand” a chance while standing before God on Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. The mere mention of the word “Elul” would send a shiver down my spine. Now, Rosh HaShanah is certainly no joking matter and the judgment is very real. But in order to properly understand this day, let's look at what *teshuvah* is really all about.

People usually translate *teshuvah* as repentance. I think that definition works very well with the unsophisticated version that I witnessed as a youth. I remember seeing people with an expanded edition of the *Al Chets* that are recited on Yom Kippur. This looked something like a phone book. Yeshivah boys would stand for hours reciting every single entry, making sure they technically covered all points of any possible transgression. I think they felt like they had truly repented. While I appreciate their sincerity and can't say that I had their stamina, Rebbe Nachman describes something very different.

Have you ever seen an animal wear a medal, the latest hairstyle, or Air Jordans? Humans do, because we have the desire to feel important; we crave honor. This stems from our very makeup: our souls were taken from beneath God's Throne of Honor and want to be elevated back to their source. But Godly honor is not easy to achieve. First we must utterly humble and nullify ourselves before God. Since this is hard to do, it's easier to seek out base forms of honor like ego, pride and selfishness.

Teshuvah literally means “return” and is the process of approaching God. The laws of *teshuvah* require a person to feel shame about his or her misdeeds. Rebbe Nachman expands on this concept, explaining that we have this experience any time we hear our shame, yet remain silent. This could be our boss yelling at us, our spouse accusing us, or our friend insulting us. All these are Heaven-sent opportunities that provide us with the means to negate our ego and allow God in, initiating the process of ultimately returning to Him. By remaining silent, we acknowledge that we were insulted because of our inflated ego, and welcome the opportunity to nurture a healthy self-worth based on our spiritual greatness rather than something that others think of us.

Even more relevant is when we insult ourselves. Often we make spiritual goals and plans, and guess what? Things don't go the way we expected. We feel down and beaten, ready to throw in the towel. *Teshuvah* is about accepting failure and still believing in change. I can be happy with my efforts and take joy in knowing they are meaningful to God, no matter whether I reached my goal yet or not. This demonstrates that my *teshuvah* was not an act of spiritual egotism, but was truly for the sake of Heaven. Only this is real growth and change. Only this allows us to serve God in every situation that life throws at us.

Shame is a beautiful device, but unfortunately is becoming endangered. It is difficult to swallow only if we have an inflated ego and can't accept that we all make mistakes and look forward to becoming better people. But shame is the hallmark of a Jew. If we truly desire closeness to God, we should lovingly and “shamelessly” embrace it.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, 6

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



How delighted I was to read that you are happy! Thank God. May it always be so, my son! May you always be full of joy! We must always be inspired by the joy of being a Jew. (Letter #6)

An Auspicious Beginning

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ON THE SHABBAT of Rosh Chodesh, the first day of Nisan 5532 (April 4, 1772), Rabbi Simcha and his wife Feiga, granddaughter of the Baal Shem Tov, brought a new soul down to the world in the little village of Mezhibuzh, Ukraine. This child would grow up to be Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, known later as “The Hidden Light.”

The child’s paternal grandfather, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, was a beloved student of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Jewish revival movement known as Chassidut. The child was born in the Baal Shem Tov’s home, an inheritance that had been passed down to the Baal Shem Tov’s daughter Udel and to her daughter, Feiga. It was a home permeated with sanctity, Torah, and the constant flow of tzaddikim who regularly visited the nearby grave of the Baal Shem Tov to pray and study.

From the moment of the child’s birth, his mother took care to wash his hands in the proper way, and would do so every time he woke to nurse. She also prepared a tiny yarmulke for him, so that his head would be covered at all times. Feiga was certain that this would instill a special degree of fear of Heaven in the baby that would carry him through the rest of his life.

The *bris* (circumcision ceremony) took place on Shabbat HaGadol (the Shabbat before Pesach) and the greatest sages of the era were in attendance, including the great Maggid of Mezeritch. Feiga’s two brothers, the great tzaddikim Rabbi Baruch of Mezhibuzh and Rabbi Efraim of Sudylkov, were also present. The child was named Nachman after his righteous grandfather, Rabbi Nachman Horodenker.

After the *bris*, Rabbi Baruch approached the baby and looked closely at his features. His face shining, he declared, “This child is destined for greatness! He is filled with precious and rare qualities.”

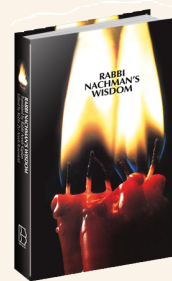
Feiga understood the implications of her brother’s words. To the surprise of everyone, she cried out, “My dear brother, please bless him that he won’t suffer from opposition! That people won’t oppose his path!”

Rabbi Baruch lifted his hand in a helpless gesture. “What can we do? What’s done is done.” The child Nachman would grow up to greatness, but his path would be filled with obstacles ...

SIDEPATH

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

266. The Rebbe said, “There are tzaddikim who are great Torah experts, fully versed in many sacred works – and because of this in particular, they cannot innovate anything in the Torah. As soon as they begin to expound and innovate, their great fund of knowledge confuses them and they weave many extraneous concepts into lengthy introductions. Their thoughts become so muddled that any new concept they may have had is irrevocably lost.”



From what the Rebbe said, we understood that if you wish to innovate, you should concentrate on the subject and not confuse yourself with extraneous introductions. Pretend that you are totally ignorant of everything except the subject at hand. You will then be able to originate many new ideas and bring

them to light in order, step by step.

267. The Rebbe said, “You may expound the Torah and innovate in any area you wish. The only condition is that you may not use your interpretations to innovate or change any law. This is particularly true of innovations based on *drush* (expository construction) and *sod* (esoteric resolution).”

From what the Rebbe said, we understood that you may expound and innovate according to your intellectual attainment, even when studying Kabbalistic works such as those of the holy ARI. The only stipulation is that you may not derive any religious practice or law in this manner.



breslov.org

P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641
P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

Pathways is a weekly publication. To subscribe, please visit breslov.org/pathways. To make a dedication, please email pathways@breslov.org.

© 2015 Breslov Research Institute

The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman’s chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.