

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT SHOFTIM • 5775 • VOL. 5 NO. 43

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Court is in Session

By Yossi Katz

RECENTLY, THE U.S. Supreme Court made a decision in redefining marriage that will go down as one of the most consequential positions in American history. The ethical conscience of the Western world will be highly influenced and perhaps completely reformed by this decision. But what really changed between “yesterday” and “today”? Didn’t we each already have an opinion about whether marriage is an act of sanctity, and if its new form meets the ethical threshold of our definition? Yet a group of almost evenly-split judges, appointed by our elected politicians, had the vast power to make this landmark decision.

Each of us possesses an all-important sense of judgment. It’s as if a legal court presides in our own minds. Before we make a decision, we visit this court and weigh the sides to form our decision. But what if we don’t know an answer?

This week we read, “If a matter eludes you in judgment... then you shall arise and go up to the place that HaShem, your God, chooses” – referring to the seat of the Sanhedrin, located at the Temple Mount (Deuteronomy 17:8). In ancient times, the great, true Tzaddikim who presided over the Sanhedrin would influence our decisions and steer us in the correct direction. With all the challenges of today’s “modern” world, wouldn’t this be refreshing? But the Holy Temple is no longer and our questions remain. Where do we go today?

As simple human beings, our understanding of God is relatively primitive. Often, *we* decide what God thinks of us relative to our actions, based purely on our emotions and feelings of self-worth. How does God really look and feel towards us? The same way our ethical system is based on a Godly truth that is disseminated vis-à-vis the Tzaddikim, so too, the input of the Tzaddikim is necessary when trying to understand the fundamentals of a God/me relationship. They have reached incredibly higher levels of Godly perception and have the ability to see much farther than we can.

An example of this is when we feel we have erred and are now distant from God. Our natural reaction is that God hates us and wants nothing to do with us. Yet, Rebbe Nachman teaches, it is at precisely moments like these that God looks at us, waiting to see if we will serve Him by salvaging whatever measure of good we can. Why? Because when we are so down on ourselves that our ego is null, any little thing we can do is purely for God’s sake. God actually loves when we serve Him from a distance. We need a true teacher that can help us develop this sort of attitude.

Though we can no longer visit the physical address of the Sanhedrin, the knowledge and perception of Tzaddikim is available and accessible even today. As we approach the most important days of the year, we know that this is the time to build a great and meaningful relationship with God. But we also recall having previously tried before getting snagged somewhere along the way. Let us begin again to look for true advice, but this time, pursue it relentlessly until we find something that works, something that will embolden our lives and bring about real change.

There are many Tzaddikim and also many spiritual charlatans. This makes finding the actual Tzaddik *who can speak to my soul* very difficult. Furthermore, even if I have found that Tzaddik, understanding and applying his teachings without allowing any preconceived notions to skew his words isn’t easy. But if we earnestly engage in this process, God will surely be patient with us and guide us to find that true Tzaddik and his true intent. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Birkhot HaPeirot 5

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Man was created in order to know God – and for this it is well worth enduring all the toil of this world. What is more, the very fact that a person knows and believes this lightens his labor and enables him to turn everything into joy! (Letter #474)

The Watchful Tzaddik

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN REBBE NACHMAN was a tiny baby, his mother, Feiga, had to travel away from home for a night. His father, Reb Simcha, could not be left in charge of the child, since he was rarely at home. Reb Simcha's practice was to spend days, weeks and months out in the fields and forests in deep *hitbodedut*, and it was unusual for him to be in Mezhibuzh for any length of time.

At that time, the great tzaddik, Rabbi Chaim of Krasni, was staying at Reb Simcha's home. Feiga asked her guest to keep an eye on little Nachman while she was gone, and that's exactly what he did. Eyes half-opened, in profound contemplation of the sleeping infant, Rabbi Chaim kept watch over him the entire night. Even though it was his lifelong practice to arise for *Tikkun Chatzot*, the Midnight Lament over the destruction of the Holy Temple, on that night he remained at his post, focused on the baby, until morning.

When Feiga returned home the next day, he said, "I set aside my devotions last night just so I wouldn't miss a moment of gazing upon the wondrous face of your child!"

Rebbe Nachman was blessed to be raised in the most rarified of atmospheres. His parents' home was a regular meeting point for all the early Chassidic masters, who would come to pray at the nearby grave of his great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov. In later years, Rebbe Nachman would confirm that as a young child, he paid close attention to every bit of conversation, study and prayer that took place around him. Thus, he was literally raised on the knees of spiritual giants.

They, in turn, fell in love with the child with the "beautiful eyes" – a quality that he had inherited from his ancestor, King David. Though he could hardly be included among their number, they didn't drive him away as they would some other, distracting child. Rebbe Nachman, in turn, was like a sponge, soaking up the Torah and holiness that the visiting tzaddikim exuded. Rabbi Chaim of Krasni – Rebbe Nachman's early "babysitter" – kept a watchful eye on the developing boy. Throughout those early years, he would state time and again that it was clear that Nachman was destined for greatness.

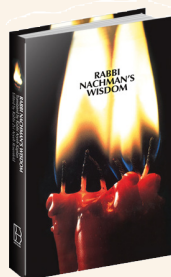
Based on Or HaOros I:44-47

SIDEPATH

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

268. "How was the Holy Temple destroyed...?" "How long will we cry out in bondage...?" "Until when...?" "The son of Your maidservant..." These are all part of *Tikkun Chatzot*, the Midnight Prayer lamenting the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Divine Presence.

Taking these hymns as an example, the Rebbe spoke of how much we must cry out before God. He noted how much these prayers awaken the heart. He also greatly praised the chorus, "My beloved came down to His garden," as a debate between the Jewish people and God that can profoundly arouse the heart.



269. People are often very confused as to the best way to serve God. Sometimes it seems necessary to act in one manner, but later, this appears completely wrong and another method seems best. The Rebbe said, "Why is it necessary to confuse yourself? Whatever you do, you do. As long as you do not do any evil, Heaven forbid."

270. The Rebbe said, "In the *Hodu* (Psalm 107) which introduces the Friday-afternoon *Minchah* service, you can be brokenhearted and pour out all your thoughts before God. This Psalm speaks of the troubles of the soul and how one cries out because of them. It can be understood by anyone.

"When you say *KeGavna* before the Shabbat-evening *Maariv* service, you should be aroused with great joy and emotion when you recite the words, 'And all of them are crowned in new souls.'"



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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.

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon