

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Look for Your Good Point

By Yossi Katz

***THERE ONCE WAS** a man who used to visit Rebbe Nachman whenever he came to Breslov. But after his fortune turned and he became wealthy, he no longer had time to visit the Rebbe. Once, while he was rushing around Breslov on business, Rebbe Nachman saw him and called him in. “Did you glance at the sky today?” the Rebbe asked. The man admitted that he hadn’t.*

Calling him to the window, the Rebbe said, “Tell me, what do you see?” “I see wagons and horses and people scurrying about,” the man replied. “Believe me,” Rebbe Nachman said to him, “Fifty years from now there will be other market days. There will be other horses, other wagons, different people. What is here today will no longer be. What pressure are you under? What’s making you so busy that you don’t even have time to look at Heaven?” (Kokhavey Or, p. 41, #5).

The goings-on in our lives often propel us into a deep spiritual sleep. Things can be happening all around us, critical events in our lives that we might one day look back at and wonder, “How could I have missed that?” Yet we are utterly numb to real life. We also possess “spiritual golden calves” and related forms of modern idol worship that distract us enough to sever our connection with God and His spiritual reality. For example, the pursuit of money and pleasure can easily blind us to the true purpose of life. How do we wake up and truly live?

The Midrash connects the sin of the Golden Calf with the Red Cow, whose ashes have the power to purify. In the words of the Midrash, “This can be compared to the son of a maidservant who soiled the king’s palace. They said, ‘Let his mother come and clean up the mess’” (*Tanchuma, Chukat* 8). The Red Cow in whose image the Golden Calf was formed is compared to the

maidservant’s mother: it has the power to cleanse from idol worship. But the Red Cow is no longer to be found, so how can we sprinkle its ashes?

Our *parashah* states, “Take for yourself a perfectly red cow, which does not have a blemish, upon which no yoke was laid” (Numbers 19:2). The *Zohar* (*Chukat*, p. 180) comments that “red” refers to harsh judgments, whereas “perfect” refers to softened judgments. When we are distracted and lose connection with God, harsh judgments arise against us. These judgments seek to separate us from our Heavenly Father by claiming that we are distant and that we are not compatible with Godliness. Therefore we feel spiritually dead.

However, “perfect” refers to the proper balance. Although we feel a harsh bleakness, we can add a good dose of kindness to the mixture in order to soften the judgment. This is done by being kind with ourselves and identifying our one “perfect” thing, our “good point” – “which does not have a blemish, upon which no yoke was laid.”

No matter what we have done (or not done), the essence of a Jew is completely good and pure. Rebbe Nachman teaches that there is no Jew who does not possess good points. We must look deeply into our souls and find the good that is expressed through our thoughts and actions.

In order to wake up, we must first understand who we truly are and how special it is to be a Jew. We are sleeping only because we have forgotten our intrinsic nature! Yes, perhaps I made a wrong turn, but by judging myself with kindness, I will discover that even in the greatest darkness, my good point still shines forth. It is this experience that helps me distinguish my inner-reality from my deceitful perception. As I connect with my good point, I begin to realize my true essence and am sprinkled with the ashes of the Red Cow, so that all the barriers that have kept me from spiritual growth finally dissipate.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hashkamat HaBoker 1

The Baal Shem Tov's Remedy (Part 2)

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN BEGAN his tale...

There is a certain spot among the fields in the city of Ostrov about which the locals only whisper mysteries. Down through the generations, people have passed the story of a supernatural event that took place there.

During the tenure of the Maharsha as chief rabbi of that city in the early seventeenth century, Ostrov was home to a massive church that abutted the Jewish cemetery. It was impossible to get to the cemetery without passing by the church, and a thick miasma of impurity surrounded the place. Whenever the Jewish community had to conduct a funeral, it was in great danger. Just as the funeral procession would pass the church, the priests would ring the bells and begin to sing stirring songs that could literally pull those who were weak into the arms of the church.

The Maharsha knew of the evil effects that the church had had on some members of the Jewish community. Before his passing, he devised a plan to remove the source of danger altogether. In his will, the Maharsha instructed the burial society to make sure to carry his bier past the church, and to lay a copy of his magnum opus, Chiddushei Aggadot, on top of his body for his final journey.

At his funeral, the entire community gathered to pay their last respects. They accompanied the bier out to the cemetery, and just as the Maharsha's body passed the church, he sat up and began to rifle through the pages of his Chiddushei Aggadot. As if struck by thunder, the entire procession stopped ... and saw the church slowly but inexorably sink into the ground. The entire building, with everyone inside, sank lower and lower until the earth closed over it. The only sign in the now-empty field was a depression marking where the church had once stood...

After Rebbe Nachman finished his wondrous tale, his daughter Sarah stood up from her sickbed, whole and healthy.

In later years, Sarah had the custom of telling this story to the ill as a means of bringing them healing, and Reb Nachman Tulchin, the student of Reb Noson, would do the same.

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 197-200

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SIGHING. 1. The sighs and groans of a Jew are very precious. When a person is lacking something, sighing and groaning can bring wholeness and completeness. But only if he is close to the Tzaddik who is the guide and leader of the age. The breath of the sigh is drawn from the breath of life with which God created the world.



When a thing is incomplete, it is really lacking in life force – the breath of life which keeps it in existence. When a person breathes long and deep, he draws new life. But the breath of life is in the Torah. The Tzaddik is totally bound to the Torah. Therefore the breath of life is with the Tzaddik. From him we can draw the breath of life for our groans and sighs, and bring wholeness and completeness where before they were missing (*Likutey Moharan I, 8:1-2*).

2. A person may be praying with great devotion or be at the height of meditation, and then suddenly in the middle he falls from his level. It is a sign that there is some flaw in his faith. He should feel broken and ashamed. How could he fall from Heaven to earth? He should arouse tender pity for himself to the point where he literally sighs. This sigh will bring him back to his level (*ibid. I, 108*).



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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.