

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYISHLACH • 5777 • VOL. 7 NO. 9

📧 breslov.org/pathways



Room to Breathe

By Yossi Katz

WHEN IT RAINS, it pours. It often happens this way: first we have one problem, then another comes up, then a third... Before we know it, we feel completely overburdened, and find it difficult to even breathe. We imagine all of the world's issues being lumped together and heaped on our shoulders.

Our gut reaction to feeling overwhelmed is to hibernate in a state of utter disconnect. We cut ourselves off from friends, from our true selves, and especially from God. We feel hopeless and despondent, unable to cry out to our Father in Heaven, the only One who can bring about our salvation. This vicious cycle is summed up by the golden rule: "The more attention yielded to anguish and problems, the more anguish and problems will pursue you."

In order to pacify the anger of his brother Esau, who was upset with him for stealing his father's blessing, Jacob sent a handsome tribute. Jacob did everything with great wisdom. He told Esau, "I have acquired an ox and a donkey" (Genesis 32:6). Then he separated the different species included in his tribute, as he told his servants, "Leave a space between one group and the next" (ibid. 32:17).

According to Kabbalah, the "ox" refers to Esau (see Isaiah 34:5-7) and the "donkey" to Ishmael (Ishmael is called a "wild donkey of a man" in Genesis 16:12). These two adversaries and their attendant nations were to be the rulers and oppressors of the Jewish people in exile. They represent the exile and all of its bitter problems. Whether through physical oppression or by their negative spiritual influence, their ultimate goal is to bring us to the point of utter despair and hopelessness.

Jacob understood that it is precisely when all of our troubles are lumped together at once that we become overwhelmingly despondent, truly exiled from God. He therefore taught us the secret of separating our problems into "groups" and looking for the "spaces" of relief.

Our first survival tactic is to recall our past. How many times were we in similar, seemingly hopeless predicaments and not only survived but perhaps even prospered from our situation? When we remember our past salvations and express our gratitude to God for taking care of us until now, we reinforce our sense of faith and trust, thereby cultivating the inner-fortitude that we each process.

But it doesn't end there. While our troubles are not at all easy to deal with and we are truly in pain, Rebbe Nachman teaches that every problem and trouble we face is packaged together with a silver lining. As difficult and as bitter as life can be, God's kindness and love for us is present in every situation. The benefit may not always be obvious – in fact, it may only be our realization that our situation could be much worse. Our job is to find those seemingly hidden threads of relief and, rather than disconnect, use these opportunities to express our gratitude and thanks to God for the little bit of good we have discovered.

When life gets bumpy and we find ourselves becoming emotionally overcome by our constant problems, we can give ourselves breathing room by finding the little specks of good and salvation that exist in-between the troubles. By discovering those spaces of relief, we defuse the united front of our enemies and are free to rediscover our greatest weapons: hope, faith and prayer. By wielding this powerful arsenal, we can successfully navigate even the greatest challenge.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Kilay Beheimah 4:8

Charity Also Benefits the Giver

Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld brought many American youth closer to Torah Judaism and to Rebbe Nachman. One of his memorable, hands-on lessons was about tzedakah (charity).

WHEN THE BEIS HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, stood in Jerusalem, Jewish emissaries stood near the Altar. As the sacrifices were offered, they would recite certain passages from the Torah, called *ma'amadot*, and pray for the welfare of the Jewish people. After the destruction of the Temple, donations made on a regular basis to support the yeshivot were called *ma'amadot*. The people who regularly gave these *ma'amadot* to the yeshivot had a share in the students' Torah study.

Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld used the concept of *ma'amadot*, regular donations to a yeshivah, to teach his Talmud Torah students in New York City the importance of *tzedakah*. Since the money was channeled through the Breslov elders in Israel, the students learned to respect and appreciate the rabbis, too.

Chaim Kramer recalls:

“My father-in-law, Rabbi Rosenfeld, got the Talmud Torah kids involved with the Breslov Yeshivah in Mea Shearim. Every month he expected each child to give a small sum – for example, ten cents – to the yeshivah. In that way, the children had a share in the yeshivah's Torah learning. In addition, the children were expected to raise money for the yeshivah. So, for example, every month, each child would bring in a dollar that he had raised from others, together with ten cents of his own money. This was one of the ways that Rabbi Rosenfeld trained his students to give *tzedakah*.”

Rabbi Rosenfeld encouraged his older students to send their *tzedakah* money to the Breslov elders in Jerusalem, who would distribute it for them. At the conclusion of every class, Rabbi Rosenfeld collected small sums of money from his students and wrote their names on a sheet of paper. His script was so tiny that he wrote sixty to seventy names on one sheet.

Afterward, he phoned Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz in Jerusalem (and, after Rabbi Sternhartz passed away, Rabbi Elya Chaim Rosen, the rosh yeshivah), and told him the names of the students who had contributed money so that he could pray for them.

Through these *ma'amadot*, Rabbi Rosenfeld was training his students to consistently give *tzedakah*, and also forged a relationship between his students and the Breslov elders that would last for many years to come.

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 6. Pride and sexual immorality are bound up with one another. By guarding the Covenant in purity, one can rid himself of pride and find the light that will guide him on the path back to God (*Likutey Moharan I*, 11:3).

7. The basic reason why people have to struggle bitterly to make a living is because they are guilty of sexual impurity. For those who keep themselves pure, their work is the labor of building the Sanctuary. Our Sages teach us that there were thirty-nine separate kinds of labor connected with the construction of the Sanctuary. Each labor is a light, making 39 lights. But when a person undermines the holy Covenant, poverty pursues him. He takes the yoke of bitter struggle and puts it around his own neck. For him, work is the scourge of the 39 lashes with which offenders are punished (*ibid. I*, 11:4).

8. There are two levels of observance of the Covenant. The first is that of the man who has relations during the six workdays. ... This is the level of the lower unification. Purity here leads to understanding the law of the Torah – the “secrets.” The second level is that of one who has relations only on the night of Shabbat. This is the level of the upper unification, where it is possible to access the mystical depths of the Torah, the “secrets of secrets” (*ibid. I*, 11:5).



breslov.org

PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 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.

© 2016 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.