

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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How Do We Redeem Ourselves?

By Yossi Katz

I WOKE UP this morning after another restless night. With an achy back, stuffy nose and aggressive cough, I wished I could stay in bed under the warm covers. After getting dressed and finally getting all the kids on their way, I opened the front door and was besieged by the freezing cold wind. I got into my frost-covered car and waited patiently as it heated up. Couldn't I live in a nice, warm climate, or at least be able to take some time off to relax in one? Why does life always have to be so difficult?

The Torah tells us, "Jacob lived in the Land of Egypt for 17 years" (Genesis 47:28). The *Zohar* asks, "Why does the Torah bother to single out the 17 years of Jacob dwelling in Egypt? Rabbi Shimon answered that Jacob had to deal with trouble all his life, and his days were troubled right from the beginning. When he saw Joseph standing before him, Jacob looked at Joseph and his soul was made whole as if he saw Joseph's mother. For the beauty of Joseph resembled that of Rachel, and it seemed to him [Jacob] as if he had never known any sorrow at all."

Could it be that these were the only 17 years that Jacob dwelled in happiness and satisfaction? Jacob had lived in the Holy Land – the place that was to be his eternal inheritance – and yet it was only in Egypt, an indecent land of future bondage and exile, that he found peace and harmony?

Sadness, depression, worries, anxiety – all these negative feelings originate from a spiritual blockage of sorts. It all started when Adam ate from the Tree. "The Lord God called to man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He replied, 'I heard Your Voice in the garden,

and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid'" (ibid., 3:9-10). By Adam's eating, something holy and elevated had become contaminated; it was now exiled and would have to be elevated and redeemed. This is true for us as well. Whether or not we are aware, we sometimes make certain decisions and head in a direction that is counterproductive to our spiritual potential. Our precious soul is now in a state of exile; it is crying out and we feel this cry. But how do we redeem ourselves?

Joseph was the quintessential Tzaddik. The Torah calls him "a man in whom there is the *ruach* (wind or spirit) of God" (ibid., 41:38). The Tzaddik blows away the ash covering the souls of the Jewish people, thereby dispelling their depression and inflaming their formerly smothered essence.

When Joseph was sold to Egypt, the lowest pit on earth, our very essence, Jewish spirit and joy were completely exiled. But now that Jacob saw Joseph alive, it all made sense. Joseph had not been sold in vain, but in order to save his family by providing sustenance during the years of famine. Although the national exile of his descendants was only beginning, Jacob's exile had effectively ended. True, there would be times of great darkness and despair ahead, but by finding Joseph – the goodness and small joys in the darkness – one could begin to find a way out.

Yes, we all have difficult times, sadness and worries. But when we look for the goodness and experience joy even in troubled times, we begin to elevate our perceived purposeless issues and redeem them for the incredible opportunities of growth hidden beneath. We then restore our souls to their awesome purpose of unifying us with the greatest Source. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hodaah 6

Spirituality First

By Chaim Kramer

ONCE MOSHE LANDAU, a wealthy follower of Rebbe Nachman, returned from a business trip to Berdichev. Hearing that Reb Noson was in town, he went to see him straightaway without even going home first.

Reb Noson received him warmly. Then, as usual, he began lecturing Landau about the importance of serving God rather than running after one's worldly desires, which all lead to nothing anyway since the material world is full of sorrow.

Landau smiled and said, "I have just come back from Berdichev with some beautiful merchandise. I'm perfectly comfortable. What could be wrong with this world?"

Reb Noson replied, "A man could return from a successful business trip and bring expensive presents for his family. He might even bring his wife an exquisite gold ring. But she may not like it, and she'll start an argument, and he'd rather be dead than alive."

Landau, who had indeed bought his wife a ring, went home to give it to her. Just as Reb Noson had said, she was extremely unhappy with her gift and started such an argument that Landau came running back to Reb Noson, saying, "Oy! Were you right!"

* * *

In the town of Uman lived a man known as Reb Isaac. A wealthy businessman and a Breslover chassid, he was very involved with charity to the community of Breslover chassidim. Yet he began suffering reversals of his fortune and experienced several heavy financial losses. He understood that spirituality came before financial success, and attributed his losses to God's way of making him more involved with spiritual growth. But he was afraid of poverty.

Well-versed in Rebbe Nachman's teachings about the effectiveness of prayer, Reb Isaac went to Rebbe Nachman's grave and cried, "Rebbe! I know what is wanted of me. But I don't want it! I don't want it!" Shortly afterward, his "wheel of fortune" began ascending again and he became very, very wealthy.

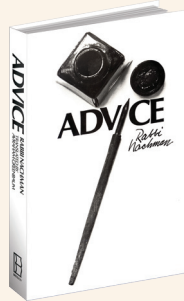
Reb Isaac never forgot what almost happened to him, and became even more charitable than before. Aside from the many families and individuals he supported, he also rebuilt the Breslover kloyz (synagogue) in the early 1900s, a building that still stands to this day.

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 13. The Serpent that beguiled Eve and corrupted her is the embodiment of sexual lust. (Other expressions used for this in our holy literature are the "whirling storm wind," the "spirit of madness," and the "foolish woman.") It is the way of the Serpent to try to beguile the "spirit of holiness," which is the Holy Tongue, and insinuate its way into our speech. The holiness of language is bound up with sexual purity. Therefore the Serpent constantly strives to corrupt our speech.

It is written, "Sin crouches at the door" (Genesis 4:7). This refers to the Serpent lurking in wait for man, trying to suck his strength by tripping him into sexual impurity. The evil inclination constantly tries to push one to sin. Its main force is directed to the area of sexual desire (*Likutey Moharan I*, 19:4).



14. Use words of holiness – Torah and prayer – to cool the heat of your passion. As King David said, "My heart waxed hot within me; while I was musing, the fire was kindled.

Then I spoke with my tongue" (Psalms 39:4). When you cool your passion with words of holiness, you will be protected from nocturnal emissions (*ibid.*).

15. Most people go through life subjected to a constant barrage of discourtesy, rudeness, and outright insults and humiliation. All this is sent only because of their immorality. Those who guard the Covenant in purity will be treated with honor (*ibid.* I, 19:3).



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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.