

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Worlds Apart

By Yossi Katz

**AT CERTAIN TIMES** in history, had things played out according to their natural progression, the world would have been altered forever. Such an event took place in this week's *parashah*.

Jacob is the quintessential Jew. He spent his days and nights toiling in Torah study while working on perfecting himself spiritually. He was so great that King David named the generation of spiritual seekers "Jacob", as it says, "Such is the generation of those who seek Him, those who seek Your face, Jacob, selah" (Psalms 24:6).

Although Jacob lived in this physical world, his soul constantly flickered Heavenward. He was able to joyfully leap above life's trivialities and trials because he lived with the knowledge that everything was God's will, meant for his eternal good.

Esau, on the other hand, was firmly grounded in this materialistic world. In Hebrew, Esau's name begins with the letters *Ayin-Sin*, which is similar to the word *ASiyah*, referring to our world, the World of Action, which is the lowest of all worlds. While God's presence and will is obvious in the upper worlds, the sheer materialism of our world causes God to seem hidden from us. Because Esau did not live with the same belief system as his brother, he did not have the skill set to elevate himself beyond the difficulties of this world. The result was a life lacking in meaning and joy. To fill the void, Esau filled his life with vanities and immorality.

But if their differences are so evident to us, why weren't they evident to their parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah? The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esau because he would "trap with his mouth" (Genesis 25:28). The Targum explains that Esau would feed Yitzchak from

the animals he hunted. Could he really have bought Yitzchak for the price of a *fleishig* dinner?

As we all engage in work to one extent or another, we know that, unlike sitting in the tent of Torah and studying, work pressures us into being busy with myriad details. We become overwhelmed and find it difficult to remember that it is really God pulling the strings. Yitzchak knew that Esau, as his name implies, was a worldly person. But Yitzchak thought that Esau's role was to bridge the gap between God's will and His seeming hiddenness in this world.

Since Esau had fed his father, Yitzchak assumed that Esau would need his blessings in order to prosper so that he, Esau, could then support Yaakov. Charity, more than anything else, reflects our faith that wealth is directed only by God. By supporting a Torah scholar like Jacob, Esau would elevate the World of Action to serve as a catalyst for holiness, and reveal that even the most mundane things like money also reflect the will of God.

Esau therefore asked his father, "How does one tithe their salt and straw?" (*Tanchuma, Toldot* 8). While these items don't require tithing, Esau wanted to fool his father into thinking that he was interested in supporting the Kohanim to the highest degree. In the end, Yaakov was blessed with worldly wealth, and Esau's potential became our job as well.

Work and materialism threaten to put us under their spell so that we forget about God and revealing His presence in our lives. But when we remember that He is hidden in everything that we experience, and that everything He does is for our good, we can joyfully long and desire to experience His Oneness in every aspect of our lives. Then we can transform this world and its darkness and sorrow into a chariot for His light and glory. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Areiv 3*

# The Right Way to Rebuke

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REB MICHEL ZLOTCHOVER** arrived in Koretz to give a rousing lecture to inspire the local Jews to improve their ways. But his powerful discourse and sharp words hit the simple folk hard. They saw how far they were from genuine closeness to God and fell into a kind of collective despair.

Reb Pinchas of Koretz was present during the speech. When Reb Michel finished, Reb Pinchas took the visitor to task. “Why do you rebuke them so harshly? Look at these poor Jews. They are destitute—they don’t even own proper clothes and shoes—yet they are here. Do you see the weather outside? It’s freezing, yet with their patched, broken shoes and thin clothes they brave the snow every day, and arrive for prayers exactly on time.

“Instead of admonishing them, you should go to the holy ark, open it, and cry to God. Tell Him to behold His precious, downtrodden children, and bring Mashiach to redeem them! Why should you reprove them?”

\* \* \*

Rebbe Nachman also spoke of the importance of offering rebuke in just the right way. Reb Levi Yitzchok Bender said, “Many people joined Rebbe Nachman for his last Rosh HaShanah. Two and a half weeks before he departed this world, he gave his last discourse. Breslover Chassidim called this lesson Rebbe Nachman’s ‘last will and testament,’ and learned crucial practical lessons about how to interact with others.

“We should be very vigilant to love our fellows, never insulting another human being. Even if we see people doing wrong, we should make sure that we never rebuke them in a manner that pushes them down so that it’s harder to improve. Instead, we have to speak in a way that uplifts them and shows that they are above such behavior.”

“But how can one learn when and how to rebuke properly?” someone wondered aloud.

Reb Levi Yitzchak gave a characteristically clear reply. “The simple yet complex answer is: pray. Ask God for assistance to understand when to rebuke and when to remain silent. Even when it is clear to you that you must reprove your fellow, beg the Almighty to show you the right time and manner to say your words, so they will really be constructive criticism.”

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:61, 71, and VI, 285*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**UNDERSTANDING.** 32. Thus the Tzaddikim make such great efforts to chase after people and draw them closer to the service of God. It is not that they want prestige, God forbid. Their goal is to attain perfect understanding (*Likutey Moharan I, 53*).

33. Each day has its own thoughts, words and actions. All of them are completely unique to that day. God has, as it were, “contracted” His Godliness, which is infinite and without end, in such a way that Godliness is present even in the innermost point of the finite, material world in which man finds himself. Thus God sends to each individual thoughts, words and deeds appropriate to the day, the person and the place. Clothed within them are hints whose purpose is to draw this individual

closer to God’s service. One should pay attention to the various things that happen to him and reflect on their significance. He should think about every thought, word and deed that God sends him each day in order to discover the hints God is giving him to draw him closer every moment (*ibid. I, 54:2*).

34. But caution is necessary when thinking about these matters. It is necessary to keep within certain limits, and one should not delve too deeply. Otherwise there is a danger of passing beyond the bounds of holiness. A person should keep within the bounds of human understanding and expand his horizons steadily (*ibid.*).



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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*