

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Mashiach Within Us

By Yossi Katz

I HAVE ALWAYS been intrigued by the dramatic meeting of the two leaders of Israel, Judah and Joseph, that takes place at the beginning of our *parashah*. The Torah states, “Then Judah approached him [Joseph]” (Genesis 44:18). This historic event foreshadows the future Messianic era, when the Jewish People will be led first by Mashiach, the son of Joseph, and then by Mashiach, the son of David (Judah’s descendant).

This week’s *Haftarah* also forecasts this future event. The Jewish People are described as being in a state of physical and spiritual exile, but eventually will be wholly redeemed. “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his companions, and I will place them with him with the stick of Judah, and I will make them into one stick. ... I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land. ... And they shall no longer defile themselves with their idols, with their detestable things, or with all their transgressions. ... And My servant David shall be king over them, and one shepherd shall be for them all, and they shall walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and perform them” (Ezekiel 37:19-24).

Our current exile is referred to as “Esau’s Exile.” Esau and his anti-spiritual cohorts seek to impress on us that our existence is entirely superficial and sensual, that life is nothing more than a series of randomly unfolding events. Accordingly, our purpose is to grab hold of whatever temporary pleasure we can. This attitude buries us by distancing us from God and any kind of deeper meaning. Ours is a habitual, meaningless existence – aka true exile!

The origins of exile and redemption can be traced back to Jacob. The Midrash states, “Jacob saw all the

chieftains of Esau and wondered, ‘Who can capture all of them?’ It is therefore written, ‘These are the offspring of Jacob – Joseph’ (Genesis 37:2). As it is written, ‘The house of Jacob shall be fire, and house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau straw (Ovadhiah 1:18). A spark goes forth from Joseph that destroys and consumes all of them.’”

Joseph is the dormant Jewish spark residing quietly within each of us. It was Pharaoh who said about him, “Can you find one like this in whom there is such a spirit?” When this Jewish spark is ignited, a tremendous spiritual fire bursts forth. The warmth of these flames invigorates our lives with joy and meaning. Their light engulfs and dispels the darkness and sadness that surround us, so that no external barrier can stand in our way. This potential lies within us, but how do we access it?

This spark ignites each time Judah approaches Joseph and their awesome spiritual powers are consolidated. After Judah’s birth, his mother Leah declared, “This time, I will thank God” (Genesis 29:35). Judah symbolizes our ability to recognize God and express thankfulness to Him. Only by proclaiming our gratitude and appreciation for God’s faithfulness can we access our flaming, hidden spirit.

Judah therefore said to Joseph, “Let your servant say something into my master’s ears, and let not your wrath be kindled against your servant” (ibid. 44:18). Our ears are the pathways to our heart. By verbalizing before God our awareness of His being connected to our every thought and breath, we can melt the bitterness of the anger that covers over our hearts and lives.

God’s goodness permeates every aspect of creation and our every experience. When we look for God’s kindness even in the bleakest of times, and thank Him for it, we unite Judah with Joseph and are worthy of great redemption even in the thick of exile. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkat Hoda’ah 6

Weathering the Winter

By Yehudis Golshevsky

FOR MOST OF us, it's hard to imagine the level of deprivation that people suffered in Eastern Europe not so long ago. R' Chaim of Kiblitsh, a Breslover chassid, lived in a small home that didn't have heat. It was virtually a miracle that he and his family survived the icy Ukrainian winters.

Strangely enough, despite his poverty and insufficient winter gear, he never went into any house that had heating even when the opportunity arose. While most people went out of their way to get a little relief from the freezing temperatures, R' Chaim would wait outside even if the homeowner invited him in.

More than one person noticed his unusual behavior and wondered what could be behind it. Whenever he was asked, R' Chaim gave an answer that revealed a high degree of self-awareness and personal ethics.

"I can't afford to heat my own home. As you can imagine, our situation is very difficult; like most people, I would certainly appreciate a good thawing-out that could be achieved so easily by just stepping into my friend's heated home. But it is also forbidden to covet what other people have. I'm afraid that if I were to warm up in someone else's house, I'll have trouble keeping from feeling that I would give anything to live there. That's why I decline such invitations."

* * *

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichov was very devoted to his flock. Not only did he work hard to build and maintain their spiritual lives, he also worked to ensure that their material needs were met. He would often go around collecting food and other basic necessities that the poor required.

During one particularly brutal winter, he went around collecting wood for those who couldn't afford fuel to heat their homes. It was a matter of life and death, since in the low temperatures one could easily freeze. Once, after a making the rounds in Berdichov, he was heard to offer one of his famous prayers to the Almighty: "Master of the world! Everyone gave whatever wood they could. Now You give!"

Astoundingly, the winter immediately became much more bearable. The spell of unusually mild weather lasted a full month.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh IV:597, V:500

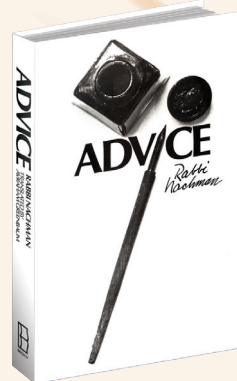
SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 46. If you are always happy, you will be able to achieve a clear, settled mind. Joy settles the mind and then you can control it as you wish. You can reflect on the ultimate purpose of life. But when a person is depressed, his intellect and understanding go into "exile" and it is very hard for him to concentrate. Depression is a terrible obstacle to serving God (*Likutey Moharan II*, 10).

47. A person with complete understanding knows that time in this world is really nothing. The sensation of time stems from deficient understanding. The greater one's understanding, the more one sees and understands that in reality, time does not exist. We can actually feel how time flies like a passing shadow and a cloud that will soon disappear. If you take this to heart, you will be free of worries about mundane matters and you will have the strength and determination to snatch what you can – a good deed here, a lesson there – in order to gain something that is truly enduring out of this life. You will gain the life of the eternal world, which is completely beyond time (*ibid.* II, 61).

48. True humility is when a person uses his intelligence to keep well away from any kind of sophistication. It takes both wisdom and great effort to make oneself like an animal [without sophistication] (*ibid.* II, 83; *Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #15).



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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.