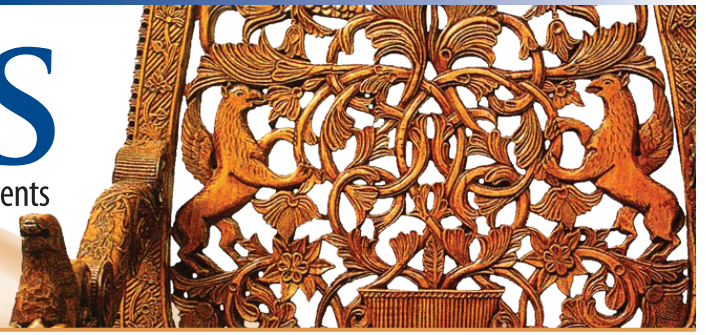


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Happy All Year Round

By Yossi Katz

THE ANTICIPATION HAS been growing for some time. The short, cold, dreary winter days, which reflect our deep spiritual slumber, are just about behind us. I recall traveling to Florida one January and being elated upon seeing some bugs and lizards crawling on the sidewalk. The vibrancy of life is so refreshing. Thankfully, the day Rebbe Nachman called “the beginning of all beginnings” – Purim – is about to begin.

What inhibits us from living a joyous life year-round? We all desire quality of life and set various goals to achieve it. But more often than not, we wind up struggling just to survive. As we are thrown various curveballs, we find that snoozing is just so much easier than remembering this great ideal that we deeply yearn for.

Just as the changing seasons give witness to the various cycles of birth and death in nature, so too, our existence here is only temporary. The thrills and pleasures of this world exist only for the moment; they cannot give us true or lasting meaning. However, the Torah and the *mitzvot* are our elixir, our tree of life. The Hebrew word *mitzvah* is related to the Aramaic word *tzavta* (connection). Through performing *mitzvot*, our soul connects to God, to eternity. We transcend the limitations of physical pleasure and connect to the true Source. There can be no greater joy and no greater vitality.

Our Sages ask: Where in the Torah is Haman, the villain of the Purim story, alluded to? In God’s words to Adam, “*HaMiN ha-eitz* – [Have you eaten] from the tree [of which I commanded you not to eat]?” (Genesis 3:11; *Chullin* 139b). On a deeper level, Haman represents the evil resulting from partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree. Because Adam ate from the tree, he was cursed with

“In sadness you shall eat” (Genesis 3:17). When Adam was exiled from the Garden of Eden and its Tree of Life, tremendous sadness descended into the world. Similarly, when the Jewish People were exiled from God’s Presence, not only were they banished, but also the pure joy of the *mitzvot* and the subsequent connection to God fell into exile. The holy sparks of spiritual joy descended into the various vanities of our world.

The Hamans of this world misrepresent those sparks and mislead us into thinking that the “heres” and “nows” of temporal, worldly pleasures are our real joy. They sway us into thinking that the various quick-fixes being offered will make us happy, but ultimately, we remain completely disconnected from the True Source and we fail to redeem the sparks of joy. Consequently, we fall into meaningless routines and feel unfulfilled.

But once a year, we are blessed with the holiday of Purim. On this day, it is customary to act silly and goofy. Only through silliness can we descend into the seemingly dearest parts of our lives and rescue those precious sparks of joy. If we act a little crazy, while affirming our great faith in and connection with God and Torah, we become empowered to face depression and transform it to the greatest joy. Don’t be afraid. This Purim is the time to let loose and experience how liberating true joy can be!

Purim is the start. It’s the day that teaches us how to hone this great skill. And after Purim, Rebbe Nachman says, this skill is absolutely necessary for day-to-day living. Only by acting a little silly can we transcend the confounding barriers of sadness that Haman has erected and reach the redemptive state of happiness and joy every day of the year.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nefilat Apayim 4

Dance of Salvation

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MEIR TEPLIKER, a close disciple of Reb Noson, had a student who lived in a remote village. Each year, Breslovers from the surrounding area would gather in Teplik at Reb Meir's home for Purim day. Reb Meir would prepare a festive meal that started around noon. He would close his blinds and fill the room with candles so their intimate light would enhance the joy of the gathering.

One Purim, during the height of the dancing, Reb Meir noticed one of his students standing on the side looking distraught.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You don't have anything blocking your *simchah*, but how can I rejoice when my daughters—especially Tzivia, my eldest—are all unmarried and I can't possibly afford their dowry?" the man cried.

Reb Meir exclaimed, "You can't find a better strategy to improve your situation than feeling depressed on Purim?" He grabbed his student and gave him a big hug. "If you are suffering so much, you need to cry out to God again and again: 'My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!'"

Reb Meir drew his student into the circle of joyous, drunken dancers and the man shouted with his entire being, "My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!" Reb Meir pressed him, "If things are so bad, one cries out to God like this again and again!" They danced this way, with the student crying out and praying, and Reb Meir encouraging him to keep at it, for a long time.

A few days after Purim, another Breslover came to the student's village for a few days and naturally lodged with his friend. On Shabbat he realized that Tzivia, his friend's eldest daughter, was particularly modest and had a sterling character. He was so taken with her that the size of her dowry was the furthest thing from his mind. "You know, I have a son around your daughter's age," he told his friend. "Maybe we should make a match between them?"

After getting the approval of Reb Meir Tepliker, that is exactly what happened. Everyone saw that by overcoming his sadness to rejoice on Purim and throwing himself into prayer, Reb Meir's student had brought about his own salvation.

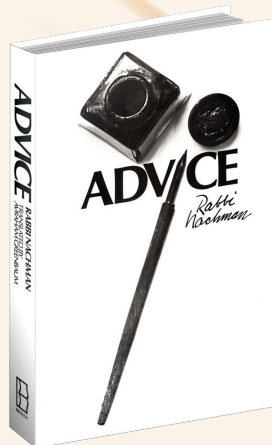
Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI, 59

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SPEECH. 19. Trust is the foundation of perfect speech: when we acknowledge God, praise Him and learn His law, all the lines of truth spread their radiance throughout the different aspects of speech and bring it to perfection (*Likutey Moharan II, 2*).



20. Speech has tremendous power. Speak many words of Torah, say many prayers, and make all kinds of appeals and entreaties to God. More than anything else, talk to God in your own words. If you are determined and make a practice of this every day of your life, you will certainly attain the ultimate good both in this world and

in the World to Come.

HITBODEDUT. 1. To taste the hidden light of Torah – the secrets which will be revealed in time to come – you should seclude yourself as much as you can to pray and speak to God. Take a good look at yourself and make a reckoning. What are you doing with your life? How is your time spent? Is this the right way to spend your life – to behave as you do before the Holy One, Who bestows goodness upon you every moment of the day? If you make yourself the judge over everything you are doing, you will be able to rid yourself of all fears and worries. Only before God will you stand in fear and reverence (*ibid. I, 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.