

Forever Young

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“This month is for you, the *roshei* (head, beginning) of the months” (Exodus 12:2).

Rebbe Nachman often talked about the importance of newness,

avoiding complacency, and constantly keeping oneself—and one's Jewishness—fresh and vibrant (see *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #51). The following may seem like a digression, but it's really not, especially if you fancy yourself a Breslover or would like to be one. People often say—and there's some truth to it—that the Rebbe is so demanding, he asks so much of a person: Learn a lot of Torah! Put a lot of time and effort into *davening* (praying) well! Do lots of *chesed* (kindness)! And make sure to be very pure and holy. I've got news for you: you want a Rebbe like that! An athlete wants a coach who runs drill after drill that develops conditioning and stamina, so he can perform at a high level while his opponent is conking out. Rebbe Nachman trains us so that we can live at a high level Jewishly and not conk out.

But the suggestion to be “forever young” requires another. And this is crucial bit of information to have if you're going to be a Breslover. When the Rebbe makes a suggestion, he always leaves a clue of how to put the suggestion into practice. The clue may not be obvious, or you may not be ready to find it. But it's there. In order to learn and *daven* a lot (and well), you need motivation. We human beings love newness: *New! First Time Ever! Never Before!* “OK,” you're asking, “we have to keep a fresh perspective on Torah and *mitzvot*. How do we do that?”

One keeps a fresh perspective by being a beginner. What does a beginner look like? Like a child. To a child, everything is new. He's never seen it before. He's curious and interested. Any path is as valid as any other. Similarly, to a beginner, each thing and idea can be anything, can lead anywhere. To a child, every word of his teacher is sacred (“Teacher said...”). To a beginner, a teacher's every word is a treasure to be cherished and contemplated over and over. The beginner is also child-like in his humility because he knows something very, very important that is all too easily forgotten: he knows nothing. He still has so much to learn.

We think we've seen and heard it all. But we haven't. Even in

our commonest routines, we fail to realize that there are other ways to view and experience the same activity. Try taking a ride in a different vehicle, with a seat higher up

than you're used to, or with seats perpendicular to the driver, to get a different perspective, a newness, that shows you that you haven't begun to see, you haven't begun to know.

Rebbe Nachman reports that there is a near infinitude of amazing, astonishing, mind-boggling events and acts going on all over the world. We have no idea what is going on! Whatever our areas of expertise, book knowledge, or ability to explain a process or event, we cannot begin to fathom how it interweaves with everything else that is going on now, today, or over the course of history.

A beginner is not a slave to preconceptions. This includes being free of the notion that past failure dooms one to future failure. Rebbe Nachman often told how, as a youngster, he would begin serving God with deep devotion and resolve. But temptation would get the better of him and he would fall. Yet that same day, he would begin again, with new resolve toward true devotion. Thus, the Rebbe would fall and begin anew many times each day. He often told us how he had many beginnings, that he continually began serving God anew (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #48, *His Praises* #6). But the Rebbe didn't save his "beginnings" only for when he failed. Whenever he reached a new level of success, he began anew, as if he had not yet taken the first step. He would ask, "How is one worthy of being a Jew?" Until the end of his life, he constantly sought a higher level.

Don't be ashamed to say you know nothing. The Rebbe said many times, "Now I know nothing, nothing—nothing at all!" even claiming, "In truth, I know absolutely nothing at all." After teaching a profound lesson, he insisted he was totally ignorant. He said, "My teachings are very unique, but my not-knowing is even more unique."

When Moshe Rabbeinu objected to going to free the Jews from Egypt because he foresaw he wouldn't be able to free them completely, God told him: You know that it won't work and you're right, but I know better (*Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin* 5:19). Your unsuccessful efforts now make possible the full and final redemption that will ultimately come—speedily, in our lifetime. Amen.

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

—Based on *Sichot HaRan (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom)* #3