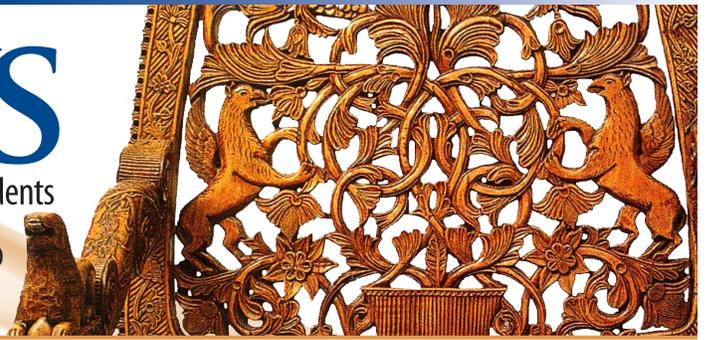


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Holier Than Thou

By Yossi Katz

We hear about it all the time. Fighting, arguing, accusing and judging, all supposedly for the sake of Heaven. The excuse is always the same: “Doesn’t it say in the Torah, ‘You shall reprove your brother and not bear a sin because of him’”? (Leviticus 19:17). Isn’t this what all our caring and sincere rabble-rousers claim?

Recently, bloggers and online whistleblowers have joined the chorus of well-wishers. Well, they may be in for a big surprise. This commandment is perhaps the greatest opportunity for our evil inclinations to take advantage of a positive mitzvah and use it as a catalyst for sin. Didn’t he/she do such and such? Surely he/she should be criticized, chastised and possibly even publicly humiliated!

What about the times we should acknowledge that our fellow Jew has done something wrong?

We know and understand that no one is perfect and all of us have our personal shortcomings. However, the Torah commands us to look for the good that we also abundantly possess, and judge our fellow Jew positively. Working on judging others (and ourselves) positively should be our top priority.

But what about the times that the *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) specifies that we do acknowledge that our fellow Jew has done something wrong? Rabbi Akiva declared in the times of the Talmud: “I doubt if there is anyone in this generation who is capable of giving rebuke!” (*Erkin* 16b; see Ein Yaakov). Rashi explains that the lesson is to never rebuke someone by embarrassing him publicly. The Talmud continues: “If it is a question of rebuking for the sake of Heaven or abstaining because of false humility, it is better to abstain” (*ibid.*). Rashi explains that the Talmud is teaching that even if one refrains from rebuking because he

made himself as if he was too humble to say anything, that’s preferable to rebuking for the sake of Heaven.

How much more so is this true in our time! Would Rabbi Akiva not be screaming this out to us?

Rather, the proper way is to speak pleasantly to our friend’s heart. We should never publicly humiliate anyone, cause embarrassment or, God forbid, resort to fighting, arguments and accusations. Anyone – even rabbis – who stir up arguments and fights is making a terrible mistake. It is of absolute importance for us to avoid fighting at all costs, and especially not get caught up with the rumors and quarreling against innocent Jews.

The Torah has commanded us to observe the 613 *mitzvot* that we received from Moshe, the true tzaddik. Let’s work on those and not add any of our own creations.

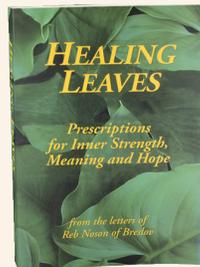
Based on Likutey Halachot, Yayin Nesoch 4

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

God does not desire the existence of this world for the sake of its vanities and futile pursuits; these only exist to give man free will. What God wants and really desires is each good movement and each good point that every Jew manages to catch each day, and which the true tzaddikim refine and elevate and build into wondrous, awesome edifices. (Letter #214)



You must fortify yourselves constantly, all your days, to desire and to yearn for God and for people who seek the absolute truth, until you are able to shatter all the remaining barriers and to see the pleasantness of God. (Letter #80)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Translated & compiled by Chaim Kramer

“Observe My statutes and My laws, which a man should carry out and live by them. I am God” (Leviticus 18:5).

There are two types of *mitzvot*: those that can be explained rationally and those that cannot be explained rationally. Those that can be explained rationally are accepted by the nations, such as the Torah laws prohibiting murder and incest. But those that cannot be explained rationally are cause for the nations to question and torment us: Why do we follow laws that do not have a reason?

There are two types of questions: those that have answers and those that cannot be answered. The latter are rooted in the Vacated Space, the paradoxical creation from which God removed His Presence, although He is present there at all times. The Vacated Space cannot be understood with human reason.

Paralleling the two types of questions, we are given two types of *mitzvot*. Those *mitzvot* that can be explained rationally parallel those questions that have answers. Those *mitzvot* that cannot be explained rationally correspond to those questions that cannot be answered. The latter were given to strengthen our faith, as they are rooted in the Vacated Space, which cannot be understood. Both types of *mitzvot* were given by God. Not so the statutes of the nations, which are not rooted in an exalted place at all (*Likutey Halakhot* IV, p. 428-215a).

* * *

“Live by them”—not die by them (*Yoma* 85a).

One should *live* with the Torah and not feel suffocated by it. He should not seek extraneous devotions or unnecessary *halakhic* stringencies. Rather, he should enjoy doing the *mitzvot* as best as he can, and not seek to fulfill them according to every *halakhic* opinion. The greatest wisdom is not to be wise at all—just to serve God with simplicity and straightforwardness, since what God really wants is the heart (*Likutey Moharan* II, 44).

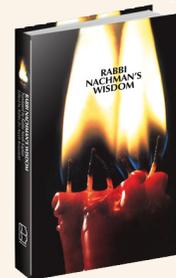
When he was young, Rebbe Nachman spent much time and effort observing the *mitzvot* according to the most stringent views. Afterwards, he realized that the proper way to serve God is to choose to observe one *mitzvah* with absolute stringency. As for the other *mitzvot*, one should fulfill them in accordance with the normative *halakhah* as presented in the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #235; see also *Crossing the Narrow Bridge*, chapter 1).

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

25. Thoughts exist in the mind in groupings, like bundles stacked one atop the other. When a person needs a fact, he remembers it by drawing it from its place in his mind.

Many associations and symbols are located in these bundles in the mind. One remembers a fact because he encounters some idea that stimulates the association and symbolism associated with a particular thought. That idea is then brought forth out of all the bundles arranged in his mind.



When a particular thought emerges, all the other thoughts in his mind are turned over and rearranged in a different pattern. [It is just like the physical case, where removing something from a parcel or pile causes its entire order to be rearranged.]

26. Most people think of forgetting as a serious drawback. But to me, it has a great advantage.

If you did not forget, it would be utterly impossible to serve God. You would remember your entire past, and these memories would drag you down and not allow you to raise yourself to God. Whatever you did would be constantly disturbed by your memories of the past.

The past is gone forever and need never be brought to mind. Because you can forget, you are no longer disturbed by the past.

This is very important to consider when serving God. Most people are distressed by past events, especially during prayer. The best advice for this is simply to forget. As soon as an event is over with, forget it completely and never think about it again.



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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.