

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Master of Deception

By Yossi Katz

UNDOUBTEDLY YOU'VE HEARD this story: one of the world's foremost journalists, someone millions of people rely on to keep them informed about world events, has been accused of fabricating news stories. I think this shocks us because it begs an all-important question: "What is reality and what is nothing but a Hollywood production?" And: "How many other things have the media and other trusted agencies fed us that are total fabrications?" This episode is a stark reminder of the awesome power and deception of falsehood.

God is One; His truth is inseparable from Him. So where do lies, deception and falsehood fit in to the balance of things?

Before the world was created, God's light was everywhere. There was no room for creation or freedom of choice. No other reality existed but God's Oneness. Therefore He concealed His light in order to create our universe. His light is still there, but now we have to choose to uncover it. As a result of this process, the forces of falsehood exist and thrive. They are the forces that allow God's light to stay hidden.

This week's *parashah* features an interesting dichotomy. When one person steals something from another (*gezeilah* in Hebrew), he must repay his victim for the loss incurred. But if he takes something without the other's knowledge (*geneivah*), he has to pay double! This is interesting because taking something from someone in broad daylight often means using intimidation and force, while stealing without the victim's knowledge would seem to be a lesser crime. Why, then, does the Torah double the punishment for the latter?

Those who strive to build a relationship with God quickly realize the difficulties that lie in their way. We are surrounded by confounding thoughts and ideas. The forces of deception surround us and confuse us. They show us a lack of progress, cause us to be unsure which of the many paths to follow, and bombard us with negative or illicit thoughts that we

thought we outgrew long ago. We are ensnared by a thick cover of darkness and unsure where to turn.

This is most obvious when it comes to prayer. We so badly want to call out to God and connect with Him, but we feel hemmed in all sides. The forces of deception do everything in their power to stop us from connecting to the Source, and make powerful arguments against even trying.

But lies have many holes. We can expose their falsehood and dispel the darkness by finding the point of truth within ourselves. No matter what I may have done wrong or whatever negative thoughts surround me, if I turn to God honestly and express my sincere desire for Him, I can dig my way out of the lies that are telling me otherwise. The point of truth is my soul talking. When I tune in to its cry, however muted it may be, no darkness can ever hide me from reality.

Theft is a terrible crime – it means taking something that doesn't belong to you. Yet stealing clandestinely is ultimately worse because the deceit involved creates a false reality that ensnares so many. By looking for truth and exposing the big lie, you not only save yourself but also rescue all the others who are trapped in falsehood. When the thief is caught and his deception revealed, he pays double, because not only must his original robbery be recovered, but also the collateral damage caused by his deceit must be returned. You have the power to expose him!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geneivah 5

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



In all suffering there are hidden favors from God, and in every injustice there is some fairness. In all strict judgments there is kindness, and in all one's falls and spiritual declines, God is there. (*Letter #339*)

Sing to God!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MOSHE BRESLOVER provided a glimpse into the depth and beauty of Reb Noson's Divine service. "Once I was traveling to Uman with Reb Noson. Our covered wagon served as a kind of traveling *beit midrash* for prayer and Torah study. Reb Noson would always cover his face with his *tallit* while praying. Although he usually prayed loudly and joyously, on this occasion he seemed preoccupied and intoned the prayers in a still, pained voice filled with longing. Every word was uttered in a brokenhearted way."

Reb Moshe resonated so deeply with Reb Noson's mood that his own heart was filled with bitterness and he began to weep. When Reb Noson got to the verse in the prayers, "Sing to God, His chassidim," he paused for a few minutes. Suddenly he began to hum Rebbe Nachman's tune for *Eishet Chayil* ("A Woman of Valor") with great yearning. Reb Moshe trembled all over. After Reb Noson sang this tune for twenty minutes, he slowly began to clap his hands with force and belted out a livelier tune to "Sing to God, His chassidim!"

His prayers were so loud and joyous that the people in the town they passed through were astounded. Entranced by the deep attachment to God that they could hear in Reb Noson's voice, they chased after the wagon. Clearly, they wanted to hear him sing as long as possible.

After Reb Noson finished his prayers, he said to Reb Moshe, "You know, I felt very brokenhearted when I began to pray. I recalled how every time I would visit Rebbe Nachman, he would ask me what was new in my Divine service. It would give me so much *hitchadshut* (self-renewal). But now I feel nothing at all.

"I felt very dispirited until I reached the place where we literally call out to God's chassidim, that they should sing to Him. I didn't know how I could even say that. Then I remembered the Rebbe telling me that if things are hard, one should encourage himself with a *niggun*, a holy melody. I began to appreciate all the kindnesses that God has done for me. After I sang for twenty minutes, the bitterness was gone. I was so filled with vitality that I was able to say the prayers with real joy!"

Based on Tovos Zichronos

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

SIDEPATH

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

202. The Talmud teaches that Moses looked through a "clear pane" while other prophets saw through a "dull window" (*Yevamot* 49b). Other prophets described their vision by saying, "Thus says God." They saw it only vaguely, through a dull window. But Moses was able to understand his vision by saying, "This is the word of God" (*Numbers* 30:2). He was describing a clear vision seen through a brightly-polished window.



The Rebbe said that the same difference exists in the original Torah insights of tzaddikim. All these teachings are absolutely true. But when some tzaddikim try to fit their teachings into a biblical verse or Talmudic saying, it does not fit the words exactly. The best they can do is to find some allusion or support for their words. Then there are some extraordinary tzaddikim in the category of Moses. Their teachings fit the quotation so obviously and clearly that they can truly say, "This is the word."

203. The Rebbe said, "All my lessons are very lofty. But when I deal with combinations of letters, my lessons are most sublime." [That is, lessons derived from the initial and final letters of the words in a phrase, or by an arrangement of letters.] He also said, "I would like to go much further, even beyond letter-arrangements. But for the time being, I am remaining with this method. I still derive much pleasure from letter-combinations. There are deeply hidden mysteries that can be revealed only through such combinations."



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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.