

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The One & Only You

By Yossi Katz

REBBE NACHMAN TOLD a story:

The Simpleton had learned the trade of a shoemaker. Since he was simple, he had to study very much to master it, and even then he was not very expert in the craft. He got married and earned a living from his work. However, he was simple and not an expert in his craft, so his livelihood was very meager and limited ... Throughout this, he was always very happy. He was filled with joy at all times.

Since he had not completely mastered his trade, when he finished a shoe, it was usually triangular in shape. But he would take the shoe in his hand and speak very highly of it, deriving much enjoyment from his handiwork. He would say, "My wife, what a beautiful, wonderful shoe this is! How sweet this shoe is! This shoe is as sweet as honey and sugar!"

Sometimes she would answer him, "If that's true, why can other shoemakers get three gulden for a pair of shoes, while you only get a gulden and a half?" He would then answer, "What do I care about that? That is their work, and this is my work!" "Why must we speak about others?" [He would continue,] "Let's think about how much clear profit I make on this shoe. The leather costs so much, the glue and thread ... so much, and the other things so much. I also have to pay a certain amount for the tongues. Therefore, I have a clear profit of ten gruschen. As long as I make such a clear profit, what do I care?" He was thus always filled with joy and happiness. (Rabbi Nachman's Stories #9, "The Sophisticate and the Simpleton")

One of the greatest challenges we face is our lack of self-worth and faith in our own individuality. We so often confuse appreciating someone else's uniqueness or positive qualities with jealousy. We mistakenly think we are doing something constructive by observing

special qualities in others, while in fact we are just feeling bad about our own inability to emulate them.

But by observing the Simpleton in Rebbe Nachman's story, we can see life differently. We should stop looking to others and begin looking within ourselves. If God takes pleasure in my imperfect work, if He appreciates my efforts in spite of my own unique circumstances, should I not feel tremendous inner joy? Yes, the shoemaker couldn't make the perfect shoe, but he was able to make a fair and honest living. To him, that was all that mattered. Therefore he was able to rise above what society thought of him, and completely disregard their opinions. "That is their work, and this is my work!" he so eloquently pronounces.

This is true not only about earning a living but also about our service of God. Perhaps I was not able to pray as sincerely as the guy next to me in shul, or be the perfect parent like my next-door neighbor. Nevertheless, I do try, and even if I only produce a "three-corner shoe," a three-corner shoe also has value.

The Torah commands us regarding counting the Omer, "And you shall count *for yourselves*" (Leviticus 23:15). This implies that in order to count properly, begin by counting yourself. I am a unique person who was raised in a distinctive home and experienced unique circumstances. There is no one like me. It is impossible for me to compare myself with others; I have nothing in common with them. Having faith in myself is no less important than having faith in God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Pesach 9

Lighting Up the World

By Chaim Kramer

AFTER REBBE NACHMAN'S passing, his main disciple, Reb Noson, busied himself with raising funds to publish the Rebbe's writings and encouraging the chassidim to join the new Rosh HaShanah *kibutz* in Uman. Though he did not think of himself as a dynamic leader like the Rebbe, he also began sharing Rebbe Nachman's teachings with others. He wrote:

"At that time I was simply unconscious of the fact that even now it would still be possible to enlighten Jewish souls and inspire them to true service of God the way I had learned from the Rebbe. But although 'I was asleep, my heart was awake ... the voice of my beloved was knocking' within me (Song of Songs 5:2). The Rebbe's holy words were imprinted on my heart, they were hot as burning coals, a fire blazing in my bones ... I could not keep it inside me" (*Yemey Moharnat* I, 82).

In the first year after the Rebbe's passing, Reb Noson took every opportunity to speak to the young men in the town of Breslov about the purpose of this world and serving God, explaining the depth and greatness of Rebbe Nachman's teachings. For much of that year, however, he did not see any great fruits from his efforts. Some of the young men improved in their studies, but not in a way that gave him any sense of achievement. One young man in particular was regarded by the community as exceptionally diligent, but Reb Noson saw that he was hardly learning at all. Nevertheless, he spoke to that young man more than the others.

By the summer, Reb Noson's entire year of effort began to take effect, and this young man threw himself into his studies with all his strength. He kept it up for six straight years, finishing the entire *Shulchan Arukh*. Other disciples also attached themselves to Reb Noson, and Reb Noson realized that with persistence and dedication, he could continue the Rebbe's path into the future. He concluded:

"Every soul that came a little closer helped me see that my words were making an impression. Every little improvement I saw gave me added encouragement, and I remembered how the Rebbe had said that we would have the merit to light up the entire world" (ibid. I, 83).

From "Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

TRUTH AND FAITH. 29. Everything we do – praying, learning Torah, carrying out the mitzvot – has one fundamental aim: to reveal the kingship of God (*Likutey Moharan* I, 77).

30. If you are very strong in your faith, you will eventually reach understanding of what you believe in. The stronger your faith, the greater your understanding will be. At the outset you have no option but to have faith,

because you cannot understand the matter rationally. Through faith, you will come to understand it. Except that then there will be new, more exalted levels that are still hidden from you and beyond your ability to understand rationally. Here again, you will have to make the effort to believe. You must always have faith in the levels that are hidden from you. In the end, you will understand them also. The main thing is that your faith must be so strong that it spreads to all your limbs. This faith will bring you to true wisdom (ibid. I, 91).

31. One who always wants to be victorious is very intolerant of truth. The truth may be staring him in the face. But because he is determined to win at all costs, he ignores it completely. If you want to find the real truth, you must rid yourself of the urge to win. Then you will be able to see the truth if you wish (ibid. I, 122).



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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.