

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Take Back the Tears

By Yossi Katz

**ONE OF THE** most curious parts of this week's *parashah* has to do with the Torah's description of two of our Matriarchs. While running away from his evil, murderous brother Esau, Jacob also seeks to find the righteous marriage partner with whom he will establish the twelve tribes of Israel. He meets Rachel and immediately realizes that she is this special one. However, there is actually an older sister, Leah. Although Leah was the proposed match for Esau, through her relentless, tearful prayers she succeeded in reversing her fortune and would now marry Jacob, too.

The Torah describes their striking difference in appearance: "Leah's eyes were tender [weak], but Rachel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion" (Genesis 29:17). This description of Leah's eyes seems to imply something negative, but our Rabbis interpret it as a compliment. If it's positive, why did the Torah find it necessary to describe Leah's appearance in a seemingly negative light?

Before the universe was created, there was only Oneness. Falsehood and illusions could not exist in the truth of God's Oneness. However, in order to allow for the possibility of free will, God created the world in a way that He became hidden, allowing a perceived separation between His Oneness and "life" in general. Now there was an illusion of our existence being a free-standing, independent experience.

Esau lived in this independent, material bubble. He recognized that Isaac had the ability to bless him with tremendous bounty, but his overindulgence in material pleasures blinded him to the spiritual purpose of the blessing. Instead, he focused only on the illusory self-gratification that this world had to offer. He divorced his existence from God's Oneness as the Source of everything in creation.

Leah was a spiritual giant. She understood what Esau was all about and wanted no part of him. But what was she to

do? She was destined to marry him. So Leah attacked the source of Esau's behavior. The eyes represent seeing not just in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense. We each have the ability to rise above the physical nature of this world to see God's Providence in our lives. Our every experience is brought about through His direct influence. By living with this understanding, we can connect this world back to God's original Oneness.

Yet the falsehoods of this world often deceive us into separating from God's Oneness. Then God becomes hidden from us. When this occurs, our existence feels purposeless, and life and its challenges become overbearing. We become sad and shed tears. God's Providence that had lit up our eyes gets washed away in these tears and we become glassy-eyed, no longer able to see and experience Him.

Esau cried because he lost his material blessings and his self-indulgent existence was now in a sad state. Leah cried because she did not want to be part of his life of separation from God's Oneness. Through her Heaven-bound tears, Leah reconnected the existence that Esau had divorced from God and redeemed the light of Providence that was washed away by his tears. She thus fulfilled whatever connection with Esau she was destined to have, and was no longer bound to him.

Leah's appearance is described through the negative of crying because a person cries when he is separated from the joyful state of God's Oneness. Because her fate was joined with Esau's, Leah was seemingly bound to that "existence." But we learn from her response that when we have separated from God and fallen into a state of disconnect and sadness, our very tears contain the washed away light of God's Providence. This is because God is never truly hidden from us; it's just an illusion of this world. By taking back those tears and now crying to God with the hope that He reveals Himself to us once again, we reconnect our existence to God's Oneness and are now able to experience the greatness of His blessings. Amen!

*Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 3*

# An Otherworldly Contract

By Chaim Kramer

ONCE RABBI LEVI YITZCHOK of Berdichov went traveling to collect money to marry off an orphan girl. He came to an inn where a group of sinners were playing cards. When Rabbi Levi Yitzchok asked them for charity to help the young bride, they began mocking him and asking what they would get in reward for the mitzvah.

“*Olam Haba* – the World to Come!” he replied.

One man in particular was very derisive and said, “I have no place waiting for me there, anyway!” Then, to add insult to injury, he told Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, “But I will give you all the money you need for her dowry if you sell me your *Olam Haba*!”

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok immediately jumped at the opportunity and wrote out a contract. The surprised man agreed and signed, giving the rabbi all the money needed to make the wedding.

When the man returned home, he began laughing at what he considered a silly transaction. His wife asked him what had happened, and when he told her, she became livid. “Your *Olam Haba*?” she screamed. “What little you may have, you *sold* it?” After a heated argument, she forced her husband, much against his will, to return to Rabbi Levi Yitzchok and ask him to cancel the contract.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, of course, refused at first. The man pleaded, but Rabbi Levi Yitzchok kept on refusing. Finally the man begged, “You can keep all the money, but please, please, give me back my portion in the World to Come!” Rabbi Levi Yitzchok agreed.

With the contract annulled, the man asked Rabbi Levi Yitzchok how much of a portion he, the man, had in the future world. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok replied, “When you first sold me your portion, it truly was not worth very much at all. But now that you’ve donated that sum to marry off an orphan girl, your portion is very, very great indeed!”

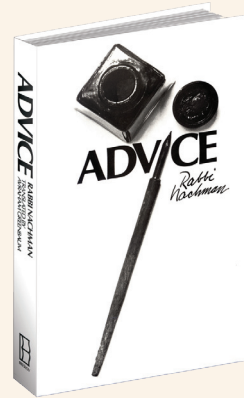
*From “More Blessed to Give: Rebbe Nachman on Charity”*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**THE COVENANT.** 5. Sexual desire is subject to the eyes: when the eyes wander, desire is aroused. The mitzvah of *tzitzit* protects against this. It also gives protection against the influence of those who are enemies of the truth.

Be very careful to fulfill this mitzvah properly. If you do this, you will begin to understand the meaning of the teachings of the Tzaddikim and follow their ways.



When you wrap yourself in the *tzitzit* and recite the blessing, concentrate on the thought that you desire a life of purity governed by the holy Covenant and by the advice and counsel of the Tzaddikim. This is the foundation of true faith.

You will be worthy of coming to the Land of Israel, and bringing the era of Mashiach closer. You will attain true prayer, and with it the power to bring about miracles. Your livelihood will be sent without difficulties – because a person’s livelihood is governed by the purity with which he leads his life. In the end, you will learn to find wisdom wherever you are: you will see the teachings which are contained in all the things around you. All the wisdom of the world will be revealed to you like a table spread with delights (*Likutey Moharan* I, 7:4).



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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.*