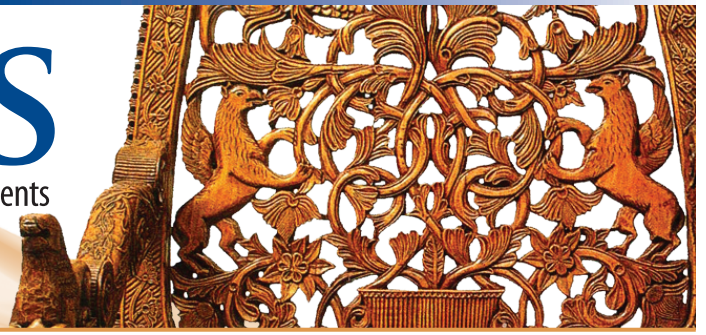


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Light Up the Night!

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF MY FONDEST memories of living in Eretz Yisrael as a yeshivah *bachur* was standing outside the doorway of our Jerusalem apartment and lighting the Chanukah menorah. As there were quite a few of us, we had several menorahs, and it was truly a special sight. My roommate was very musical and had a beautiful voice. We would sit for a long while singing the Chanukah songs and prayers, and as time passed, we young American boys would be joined by many of the local Yerushalmi men. It was quite a scene!

As strange as it was to see us American boys joined by our Yerushalmi neighbors, the idea of lighting a lamp outside one's home would seem ever stranger. For example, one usually lights the Shabbat candles in the dining room to benefit from their light while eating the festive Shabbat meals. The idea of standing outside the Jewish home, the place of the Jewish family's sanctity, and doing the mitzvah in the street is very unique indeed.

In the *Shema* we say that we are commanded to speak the words of the Torah "when you are sitting at home, traveling on the road..." (Deuteronomy 6:7). The home embodies the idea of sanctity and oneness with God. In fact, the Torah begins with the letter *beit* to signify that by fulfilling the Torah's commands, we become connected to the One who is the Master of the house (*bayit*).

On the other hand, the concept of travel is always fraught with danger. Just as Rachel passed away while traveling, "traveling on the road" symbolizes the inherent dangers and spiritual distancing of going outside the home. However, the mitzvot of the Torah help us even the playing field, so we can connect to God not only when we are sitting in the synagogue,

in a yeshivah, or in our Jewish homes, but even as we travel outside. Through the mitzvot, every external and mundane act we engage in transforms and elevates us to the highest place of God's Unity.

The verse therefore continues, "[when you are] going to sleep and waking up." One usually goes to sleep at night. Night is the time of darkness and uncertainty, when God seems hidden or disconnected from us. But we just proclaimed, "God is One!" (ibid. 6:4). We firmly believe that even when there is a perceived distance between us, we are always connected to Him. Therefore we connect the darkness of night to the light of day, and extend the Oneness of our homes to the distance of travel.

Our Rabbis teach that God's Presence never descended below ten handbreadths. Nevertheless, we kindle the menorah at this height to show that in this very place, though God may not usually reveal Himself here, there is no doubt that His Unity embodies this space as well. Likewise, we light the menorah near the entrance to the house to symbolize that even as we navigate life's difficulties and feel removed from our natural place of sanctity, nevertheless, God is always with us. We begin lighting the menorah at nighttime to show that darkness is nothing but an illusion. Through our faith in God, and the light of the menorah, "night, like day, will shine brightly" (Psalms 139:12).

The nights of Chanukah are the longest nights of the year. Like the cold weather outside, this is the time of year where life tends to be bitter and spiritually challenging. However, the simple light of a Chanukah candle descends from the greatest of heights to the lowest of places to demonstrate that God is always next to us. By taking a step back from everything going on right now and turning on this light switch, we awaken the Jewish spark within us so it can grow just a bit every night, until it finally becomes a raging fire. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 3

Forge On!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB NOSON EXPLAINS that Chanukah is a time when the spiritually ill – really, all of us – have a chance to recover. When the king hears that his trusted servant is sick, he goes to visit him. Seeing the monarch at his bedside, the sick man wants desperately to get up to serve his king, yet the king demurs. “I came here only to encourage you. Don’t get up. Just enjoy my attention, and rest and recover.”

Similarly, the menorah shines God’s light into our homes during the depths of winter and our spiritual slumber, helping us gather the strength we need to emerge from our challenges.

The Maccabees faced impossible odds when fighting the Assyrian Greeks. We, too, sometimes feel overwhelmed. We need a lot of encouragement to remember that God can help us prevail against any odds.

Breslover Chassidim would recount the powerful parable of the Baal Shem Tov, as Rebbe Nachman told it:

Once there was a king who wished to see how determined his subjects were. He placed a great treasure in a particular place and, using the power of illusion, enclosed it within many walls.

When people attempted to reach the treasure, they encountered what appeared to be solid walls. They understood how difficult it would be to penetrate such formidable barriers and some gave up. Others managed to surmount one wall, only to encounter another obstacle behind it. They, too, didn’t get very far before giving up. But when the king’s son attempted to reach the treasure, he encouraged himself, “I know that all of these obstacles are merely illusions. In truth, there are no walls at all!” He forged ahead with confidence until he reached the treasure.

Rebbe Nachman added: “A discerning person understands from this that all obstacles and enticements that diminish one’s vital connection to God have no genuine reality. This connection to God is the treasure we can all reach. If we truly know that all barriers to this goal are insubstantial, we can easily overcome them. The barrier may be the lack of money or other some other material obstacle. It may be other people trying to influence us to leave the path of truth. All one requires to surmount these difficulties is a strong heart. Enthusiasm and boldness enable one to prevail against any obstacle!”

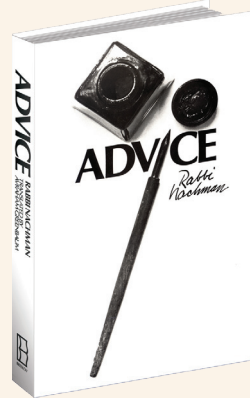
Based on Likutey Moharan II, 46

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

ALIEN PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEOLOGIES. 1. The only true wisdom is the wisdom of the Tzaddikim. It brings them to a lofty perception of God and gives them the power to communicate their perception to those who follow them. Compared with this wisdom, all other ideological systems are utter foolishness.

But because of our many sins, it can happen at times that this genuine wisdom falls into the hands of the heathens and the forces of the Other Side. Their newfound wisdom gives them power and dominion, and then the heathens gain the upper hand, God forbid. Who can bear the sound of the great and terrible cry when this wisdom falls into their hands and fools



affected to be wise? They try to adapt this genuine wisdom to their own purposes, as if it could be made a part of their own ideologies – as if their own foolishness had anything to do with the knowledge of God. They start claiming that they alone are the wise ones and there is no wisdom greater than their own erroneous speculations, parasitic as they are on the fallen, genuine

wisdom. God Himself cries out because of this.

The way to remove this wisdom from their hands and return it to its source is through acts of charity and kindness, under the guidance and inspiration of the Tzaddikim (*Likutey Moharan I, 30:6*).



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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.