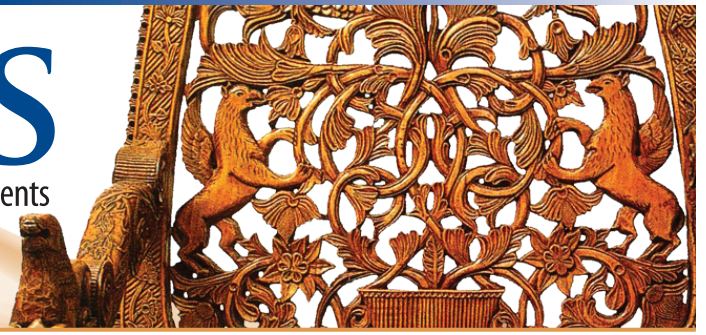


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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We're Good to Go

By Yossi Katz

DO I DESERVE to be redeemed? Do I deserve to be saved by God?

We often ask ourselves this question, whether consciously or subconsciously. Consider: The average person has 60,000 thoughts a day. Shockingly, 95 percent of them are repeated daily and 80 percent of those thoughts are negative. We tend to judge ourselves overwhelmingly negatively, and that's why we can question whether we are worthy of God's attention and ultimate salvation.

This doesn't mean that our actions make us worthy of all the goodness that God bestows on us. We can never begin to pay back our debt for the blessing of life and all the other blessings He gives us. But where we go wrong is in understanding God's true nature, and missing the ultimate reality.

This week's *parashah* repeats itself, "And God said, 'See, I have *seen* the affliction of my people who are in Egypt'" (Exodus 3:7). What is this double vision?

Moses had a prolonged argument with God. He adamantly refused to accept the role of redeemer of Israel. Why? Moses had seen the true deficiencies of the Jewish people; he couldn't fathom accepting the most difficult job of looking beyond their grave issues and seeing their true goodness and ultimate potential. As far as he was concerned, he was unable to justify their redemption.

But God disagreed. "I have seen how their idol worship will lead them to worship the Golden Calf – but nevertheless I see how they will stand at Sinai and accept the Torah" (*Midrash Rabbah, Ki Sisa* 41). God sees only the good. From His point of view, the Jews were worthy of redemption.

God then commanded Moses to throw down his staff and the staff became a snake. This showed Moses that he had spoken ill of the Jewish people, just as the snake in the Garden of Eden spoke slander against God (Rashi on Exodus 4:3). He then commanded Moses to pick up the snake by its tail, and the snake turned back into a staff. Why the tail? God was showing Moses that even if the Jewish people were so low that the evil venom of the snake was spiritually dominating them, still, the Tzaddik must grab hold of some shabby end-piece of remaining good, and thereby bring the people back to their Source.

Yes, we all are a mixture of good and bad. Sometimes we build golden calves, and sometimes we're ready to stand at Sinai and accept the Torah as if it were being given today. But we must learn from God and look only at the good. This goes beyond seeing the goodness in ourselves – it also applies to dealing with our shortcomings.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that if we are so negative about ourselves, it must be that we know that, at our source, we are essentially good. If we feel so badly when we speak negatively against our friend, it must be that we truly see the good in others and are bothered that we slipped. By acknowledging our intrinsic goodness, we strengthen ourselves to deal with our deficiencies constructively. Enough with the negativity! Let's learn how to see like God does. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Tanchumin 6

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



View everything in a positive way: for joy and not for sadness, to bring you closer to God and not to distance you. For God's kindness is never-ending, and His compassion never ceases. (*Letter #272*)

“Take a Rendel”

By Yehudis Golshevsky

TWO BUSINESS PARTNERS worked hard to make it in the world. Eventually they separated, but remained good friends. One partner went on to great success and grew very wealthy. His former partner, though, lost everything. Lacking prospects, he decided to approach his old partner for help.

The wealthy man's compassion was aroused and he graciously agreed to support his old friend. They went on this way for years; sometimes the poor man could make ends meet, but often he needed help. His wealthy friend was always generous and caring.

Eventually the poor man got back on his feet and found a good investment. It succeeded, and he began to build his capital. Everything he turned his hand to was a success, and he began to feel a bit full of himself. Curiously, at around the same time, his wealthy former partner lost all his money. Naturally, the latter approached his newly wealthy friend – the man he had supported for so many years. To his shock, his old friend didn't want to know him. Not only wouldn't he give him a penny, he wasn't even willing to grant an audience to such a downtrodden person! The formerly wealthy partner was infuriated, and burned with resentment for years.

A decade later, their fortunes reversed again. Now the wealthy partner who had fallen was wealthy again, and the arrogant man who had risen from nothing was destitute. To the shock of the man whose wealth was restored, the poor man he had once supported and who had treated him so meanly actually came to his house for help!

“I will have him thrown out,” muttered the man whose generosity had been so badly served.

But then he stopped himself. He walked into the room where his ex-partner anxiously waited and, with superhuman effort, smiled and threw him a valuable coin. “Here, take a rendel,” he said.

After a long life, the wealthy man passed away. It was time for him to be judged on high. His many flaws and failures appeared as accusing angels. Just then a voice called out, “Here, take a rendel.” And all the accusing angels dispersed.

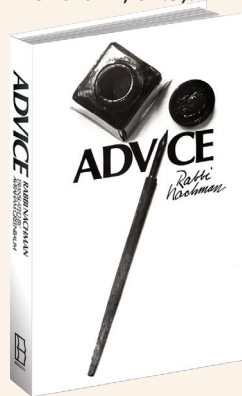
After telling this story, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender added, “Rebbe Nachman said, ‘The main point of our Jewishness is to overturn anger to mercy.’”

Based on Noam Siach III, pp. 24-27

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

ALIEN PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEOLOGIES. 9. Some of the great Tzaddikim were obliged to go into these philosophies in order to extricate and elevate the souls that fell and became sunk in them. One cannot argue that it is permissible for others to enter these philosophies because many of the great scholars of the past were involved. ... People who are not on a comparable level of sanctity – and, needless to add, the ordinary people of our own age – should never enter these realms and risk being eternally lost (*Likutey Moharan I, 64:3*).



10. The song of the true Tzaddik has the power to draw up the souls that have fallen into this form of atheism, from which otherwise there is no return (*ibid. I, 64:5*).

11. The materialist philosophers, who claim that everything operates solely by virtue of the laws of nature, are a breed of wild animals who have made terrible inroads into our people

and caught many of our sons in their clutches. Many Jewish souls are sunk in this like birds caught in a snare. If you love your soul, keep well away from these wild beasts, who would otherwise snatch your soul and consume it. Keep well away from books of speculative science, even those written by our own great sages. There is no greater evil (*ibid. II, 4:6*).



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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.