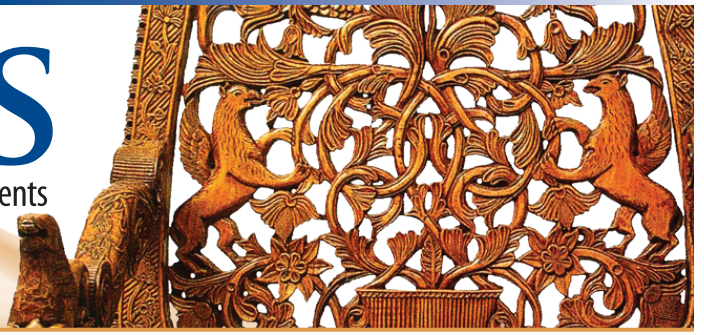


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Peace of Amalek

By Yossi Katz

**A FRIEND ONCE** told me about a frightening incident. He was swimming at a beach in Israel and all of a sudden felt himself being pulled by an undertow. For several minutes he fought back and treaded water with all his might. Finally he had no more strength; he couldn't fight any longer. So he gave up. Remarkably, he recounted that this was the most peaceful moment of his life. He had accepted that he was going to drown and was incredibly relieved to not have to struggle any more.

There are two types of peace in life: a real peace and a false peace. A real peace is when we try our best, understand our limitations and hope for a better future, while not looking negatively at our current situation. This type of peace is praiseworthy and essential for spiritual growth. But there is another peace. Let's call it the peace of Amalek.

Amalek is our greatest spiritual threat. Interestingly, he does not attack us head-on because he knows that won't work. We are not called a "stiff-necked people" for nothing. Just like during the civil rights movement, the anti-apartheid movement and many others, Jews have never tired of standing up for what they believe in. Instead, the Torah reveals Amalek's battle plan: "He cooled you off by cutting down all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and did not fear God" (Deuteronomy 25:18). This plan is so dangerous that we are implored, "You shall obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from beneath the heavens. You shall not forget!" (ibid. 25:19).

Every chain is only as strong as its weakest link. If our spirituality could be likened to a rope connecting us to God, Amalek is the force that attacks precisely at the most threadbare spot. Just as he attacked the stragglers at the rear who were faint and weary, and just as his descendent Haman attacked the Jewish people when the prophecy of our redemption had seemingly expired, so too, he attacks each one of us at precisely calculated moments.

Have you ever made an effort to improve something in your life, perhaps an important relationship with a child or spouse, or a specific character trait like anger or self-control? Initially you invest tremendous energy and effort, but soon enough things take a turn and you feel yourself sliding backwards. You become filled with anxiety and worry; you second-guess your own abilities and sincerity. Perhaps you redouble your efforts, but a short time later, again things aren't going the way you imagined they would. Like my friend treading water, eventually you take a deep breath and say to yourself, "I've had enough of this already." You accept your limitations and once again feel at peace. Welcome to Amalek's peace!

Negative emotions associated with fear, like worry and anxiety, are not bad. Without them, we would walk around without awareness and waste our lives engaged in destructive behaviors. What's flawed is our negative perception of these emotions. Amalek uses our negativity against us: "Give up trying already, this is obviously not for you!" We then fall into a spiritual and mental slumber.

God is the source of everything and, just like in Megillah, all of history is following a script that will lead to a happy ending. The Megillah story reveals that as bad as things seem now, the difficulties are really paving the way for our eventual salvation. Like Esther who tried to execute an impossible plan in the most precarious of situations, it's our job to never give up trying. Purim teaches us to transform our fear to joy because we know that every counterforce will ultimately propel us forward. I know that even if I fall back, I need to keep my head above water, because this experience itself is conditioning me for greatness.

Now, that's something to dance about!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Bechor Beheimah  
Tehorah 4*

# Purim Strategy

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REB MEIR TEPLIKER**, a close disciple of Reb Noson, had a student who lived in a remote village. Each year, Breslovers from the surrounding area would gather in Teplik at Reb Meir's home for Purim day. Reb Meir would prepare a festive meal that started around noon. He would close his blinds and fill the room with candles so their intimate light would enhance the joy of the gathering. One Purim, during the height of the dancing, Reb Meir noticed this student standing on the side, suffering.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You don't have anything blocking your *simchah*, but how can I rejoice when my daughters, especially Tzivia, my eldest, are all unmarried and I can't possibly afford their dowry?" the man responded.

Reb Meir exclaimed, "You can't find a better strategy to improve your situation than feeling depressed on Purim?" He grabbed his student and gave him a big hug. "If you are suffering so much, you need to cry out to Hashem again and again, 'My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!'"

Reb Meir drew his student into the circle of joyous, drunken dancers and the man shouted with his entire being, "My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!" Reb Meir pressed him, "If things are so bad, one cries out to Hashem like this again and again!" They danced this way for a long time, with the student crying out and praying and Reb Meir encouraging him to keep at it.

A few days after Purim, another Breslover came to the man's village for a few days and naturally lodged with his friend. On Shabbat he realized that Tzivia, his friend's eldest daughter, was particularly modest and had a sterling character. He was so taken with her that the extent of her dowry was the furthest thing from his mind. "You know, I have a son around your daughter's age," he told his friend. "Maybe we should make a match between them?"

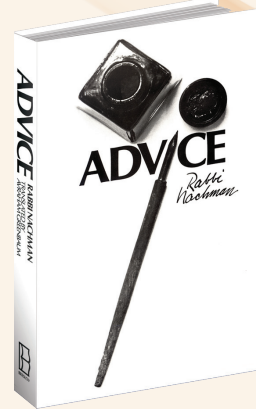
After getting the approval of Reb Meir Tepliker, that is exactly what happened. Everyone saw that by overcoming his sadness to rejoice on Purim and throwing himself into prayer, Reb Meir's student had brought about his own salvation.

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI, 59*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**AWE AND DEVOTION.** 17. There are two kinds of fear of Heaven. There are people who fear God because of His greatness and exaltedness as the Ruler and Master of the world. This level of fear adds completeness to God's Name. Secondly, there is a lower form of fear that is attained through the fear one has of other, lower things



– a wild animal, a person wielding great power, and the like. Such things can evoke the awareness of God within a person, and this second level of fear is the source of the influx of blessing into the world.

To receive the blessings, one has to make a vessel. The vessel is formed through the longing and desire one has to travel to the true tzaddikim.

This creates the shape of the vessel, and the vessel itself is formed when one comes to the tzaddik in person. The more obstacles a person encounters in his efforts to draw close, and the more energy he devotes to breaking them, the greater the vessel he forms (*Likutey Moharan I*, 185).

18. Every Jew is created with the ultimate purpose of wielding power over the angels. This is his destiny. But the angels are very jealous of a man who has power over them. He must protect himself and see that he has the strength to remain in this position of power without being cast down through the angels' envy (*ibid.* II, 1:1).



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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.*