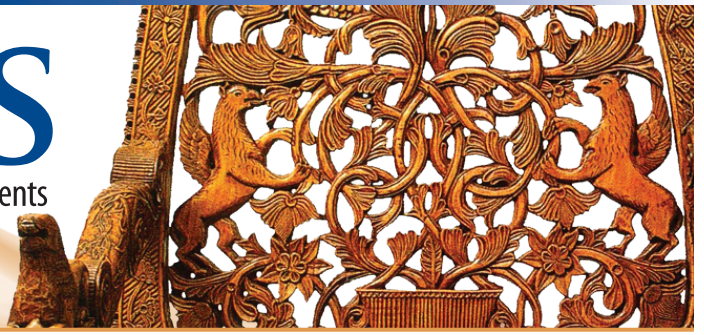


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Real Happiness

By Yossi Katz

WHAT WOULD LIFE be like if everything was just fun and games? Many dream about such an existence. The drudgeries of a day job, the responsibilities of raising a family and the endless tasks at home make the easy life sound so appealing. But would throwing away all of life's difficulties and just having fun be so great after all?

Rebbe Nachman famously taught that it is a great mitzvah to always be happy. Curiously, the Rebbe explained that sometimes it's not enough to just act in a joyful manner and let sorrow or anxiety melt away on their own. Sometimes one must forcefully transform pain and sorrow into joy and happiness (*Likutey Moharan* II, 23). The reason is that there are elements of pain and sorrow that refuse to become a platform for holiness. When we have a good time and act joyfully, these elements refuse to take a permanent leave. They later return to haunt us, never allowing us to reach an optimal level of happiness.

A great example of living with permanent spiritual bliss is Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's two sons who served as Kohanim in the Mishkan. They chose not to marry because the thought of dealing with all the mundane aspects of married life did not appeal to them. They preferred to live a worry-free spiritual existence. But they met their match when they were unable to perform an essential part of the Mishkan service: the bringing of the *ketoret* (incense-offering).

The *ketoret* was a mixture of eleven spices that was offered up to God. It had two distinct features. First, one of its ingredients was galbanum, something that is terribly foul-smelling. Second, offering the *ketoret* was the single greatest way to uplift the holy sparks from the lowest of places on earth. These two features are very much connected. The *ketoret* embodies the idea of transforming pain and sorrow into joy and happiness. The foul-smelling galbanum represents the

sorrow found in the lowly places in this world. When included together with the other spices, its foul odor is transformed to create a "heavenly aroma."

However, Nadav and Avihu had never married. Happy as they were with their spiritual existence, when they released the foul odor of galbanum, they lacked the tools to deal with this challenge. Pain and sorrow are an extension of death and bereavement, which is why these emotions are experienced at those times. The sorrow of the galbanum overcame Nadav and Avihu to the point of death.

How can we force the elements of sorrow to be elevated to the point of holiness and joy? We can turn them on their head by recognizing that if I feel sad right now because of my lowliness, then shouldn't I be happy that even a "lowlife" like myself can accomplish some measure of goodness?! For example, if I am sad because I feel far from God, isn't it amazing that God must love me so much that He still helps me do many mitzvot like giving *tzedakah*, wearing *tzitzit*, saying Psalms, and many more!

Rebbe Nachman was once speaking with someone who complained bitterly about his terrible behavior. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days turned into years and the man grew dejected. The Rebbe said, "Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad." At this the man got excited and exclaimed, "But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew!"

The Rebbe knew that the only way to restore this Jew's spirit was by helping him feel that if the argument of the sorrow was really true, then he finally possessed enough perspective to appreciate his good points in contrast to his destitute spiritual stature. When we, too, come to this recognition, there is hope indeed.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Piryah VeRivyah 3

Rebuilding from the Ashes

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE THERE WAS a devastating fire in the town of Breslov. Shortly after the conflagration, Reb Noson went with several other Breslovers to survey the damage. They saw a homeowner frantically digging through the ruins of his house. He was searching for anything that could be used in rebuilding his house. Any usable wood or metal was carefully set aside. Then the search continued.

“Do you see?” Reb Noson asked his companions. “Although this man’s house went up in flames, he has not given up on rebuilding. He is making every attempt to salvage whatever he can to start again. The same is true regarding spiritual matters. Even if a person feels as though he has completely failed and is ‘burned out,’ he should never give up hope. He needs to search out and collect every single good point buried within his negative actions and attitudes. In this manner, he will rebuild himself spiritually and truly return to God.”

* * *

Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld was a very wealthy man. He appeared modern but was enthusiastic about spiritual matters since he was strongly committed to Rebbe Nachman’s path. Yet because of his many business concerns, he spent most of his time involved in money matters. When Rosh HaShanah rolled around, he felt devastated. “I made so much money this year, but what spiritual accomplishment was accrued? Compared to what I could have done, almost nothing. I was too involved in business!”

Then he spoke to Reb Avraham b’Reb Nachman. Whenever Reb Avraham spoke, his words penetrated deeply, like a powerful spiritual injection. The two of them spoke for a short while and Reb Yisrael Abba came away from the conversation a changed man. “He told me to be happy with the positive even if it’s meager, since a little is also good. He stressed Rebbe Nachman’s teaching that a little is also good and completely revitalized me.”

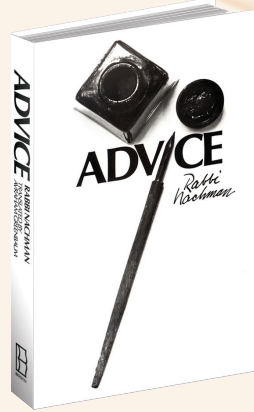
Reb Abba had a lovely family: children and grandchildren who moved to Israel and stayed faithful to the Torah. And it was all because he hung on and didn’t give up despite feeling discouraged.

*Based on Kokhvey Ohr, Anshei Moharan 29
Noam Siach II, pp. 115-116*

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

AWE AND DEVOTION. 19. Materialism, immorality and gluttony distort and corrupt the fear in a person’s heart. The remedy is to honor the Three Festivals and celebrate them in the proper way. This causes the fear that is latent in the heart to become manifest, and through it one can attain the experience of prophecy. This is the avenue to true prayer and healing (*Likutey Moharan II, 1:1*).



20. When a person falls into materialism, immorality and greed, God sits and cries out like a lion (*ibid.*).

21. A person’s devotions, his mitzvot and good deeds are his “children.” This is especially so of the tzaddikim. Before a woman gives birth she has to undergo contractions and birth pangs, and she cries and screams. It is literally the

same when you serve God. When you want to carry out a particular devotion or return to God in truth, it inevitably takes a tremendous effort. You have to cry out and groan, bending and jerking in all directions. The hardest thing of all is the start. All beginnings are difficult. This is when you need to cry out and groan the most. Even after the start, things do not necessarily come easily, and it takes a lot of effort before you achieve something worthwhile. But don’t be discouraged by what you have to endure. According to the effort, so is the reward (*ibid. II, 4:5*).



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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.