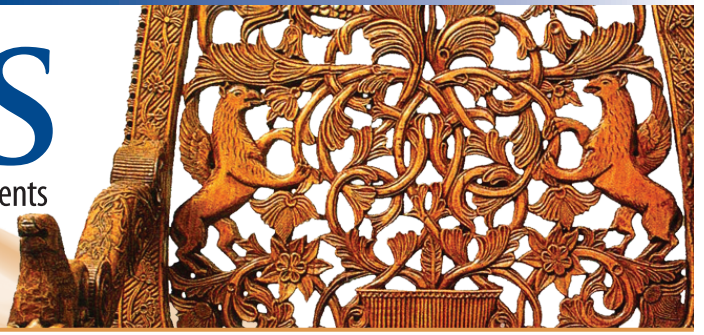


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Coming Clean

By Yossi Katz

JERRY PAYS HIS boss a short visit and says, “We’re doing some major Passover housecleaning tomorrow and my wife needs me around to take care of the heavy hauling.”

“I’m so sorry, Jerry, we’re kind of short-handed right now and I just can’t afford to have you take the day off,” his boss answers.

“Thanks, Boss, Jerry replies. “I knew I could count on you!”

Have you begun cleaning for Pesach yet? I’m sure you have. When this time of year rolls around, “Pesach cleaning fever” is sure to set in. But while we may be so worried and exasperated trying to detect and obliterate every little morsel of *chametz*, have we stopped to consider the value of the little bits of goodness that we each possess? While we shine the candlelight into the dark corners of our rooms trying to spot any traces of *chametz*, do we also peer deeply into our souls to discover our inherent Godliness and spiritual potential?

People often make a wrong assumption. They feel that if they’ve fallen or erred spiritually, they become “impure” and are “unfit” for further serious spiritual devotion. This happens all the time. For example, if someone feels guilty because of a misdeed and then a mitzvah comes his way a moment later, he may feel “disqualified” and not take advantage of the opportunity. Or he may do the mitzvah, but without joy and proper intention.

Every moment of life is an opportunity for connection with God. Just as there are an infinite number of rungs on the ladder of spiritual heights, God is present on all the lower rungs as well. There is no place in the entire world where one cannot find God and experience a close bond with Him.

Our *parashah* describes the laws of the *metzora* (loosely translated as “leper”). In the days of the Holy Temple, if someone discovered a mark of *tzara’at* on his body, he had to be brought before the Kohen. If the Kohen validated the mark, the person underwent a purification process. But what if the person discovered that his entire body, from head to toe, was covered with *tzara’at*? Then the Kohen pronounced him to be pure and he was free to go. How could this be? If a person who has one mark must undergo an entire process of purification, shouldn’t he require at least as much purification if his entire body was affected?

We learn from this an incredible lesson in God’s ways. Often, even if a person has hit rock bottom and he might be entertaining thoughts of utter failure, precisely at that moment, God is compassionate and sends him purity and a helping hand from Above. All is never lost! We must learn to abandon our so-called rational thought processes and stop “playing God.” It’s not our role to judge ourselves and others negatively. Our job is to learn about God’s true nature and become attuned to the way He truly operates.

Our *parashah* also speaks about the first mitzvah commanded to us, proclaiming the new moon. We celebrate Rosh Chodesh at the darkest time of the month, when the moon is barely visible. But this is also the time of its renewal: though it can hardly be seen, it has just started a new cycle. This is the key to each of our lives. There are always rough patches and desperate challenges, but the darkest moment comes right before the time of true redemption. Never give up!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Shiluach HaKen 4

Wiping the Slate Clean

By Yehudis Golshevsky

TO AN OUTSIDE observer, the ferocity of the opponents of Breslover Chassidim – and especially of Reb Noson – is hard to fathom. As one person put it, “So they decided not to take a new rebbe after Rebbe Nachman passed away. Why did that warrant being attacked and treated like the worst criminals?”

Reb Noson was actually forced to flee his home and wander around for most of the winter of 1865. He returned home just before Rosh Chodesh Nisan. His opponents worked overtime to ensure that Reb Noson had no peace of mind even after his return, bribing the authorities to set up a military boot factory in Reb Noson’s own home. Non-Jewish workers filled the main room with foul-smelling hides and also ate their meals there, making it impossible to clean for Pesach.

The night before Pesach, Reb Noson made the blessing over the search for *chametz*, having in mind this time that just as the *chametz* must be removed, so should the boot factory. The next day, his supporters finally convinced the authorities to remove the factory, and the workers packed up and left. People were hired to get the house ready for the holiday.

That night, Reb Noson conducted the Seder with his usual enthusiasm, serenity and joy. During the meal, his family began to talk about the hardships they had endured that winter, with the head of their family absent from their lives.

Then they began speaking about the wickedness of his opponents. Reb Noson stopped them, saying: “It is now Seder night. The Jewish people worked so hard to prepare for this special night.” He enumerated every aspect of preparation one must make for the holiday and added, “All this they do solely for the honor of Pesach. Clearly, it is forbidden to speak ill of any Jew.

“Let us instead consider how much pleasure God takes in every effort that each of His children make in honor of this precious holiday. Think how important every Jew is, that our every effort is so special; our work and every extra penny that we spend affects all the worlds.”

In this manner, Reb Noson helped his family let go of their resentments and open their hearts to the illumination that descends on this special night.

Based on Shaarey Tzaddik III, 158-159

SIDEPATH

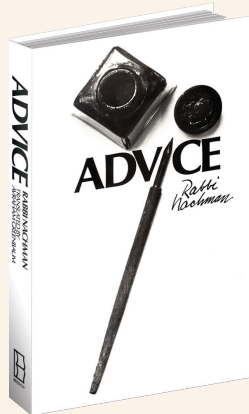
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

AWE AND DEVOTION. 22. Charity helps open the gates to holiness. This is why it is good to give charity before doing any mitzvah or good deed. The charity helps to widen the opening to the holiness that is the goal of this particular devotion, and then it will not be so hard to enter (*Likutey Moharan II, 4:5*).

23. Through giving charity you can attain fear of Heaven, and this will lead to lovingkindness. When you attain this, you will be able to serve God without being restricted by the difficulties of earning a living (*ibid.*).

24. In times when the elders of the generation fail to achieve perfection, it gives strength to antireligious ideologies. The task of each individual is to ensure that with every day that passes he gains additional holiness and deeper understanding. Each new day must be filled with more of the radiance of devotion to God. Only when a person achieves this is he worthy of the name “elder.”

When a person wastes his days without adding extra holiness, he may grow old but he cannot be termed an “elder.” Instead of enjoying “length of days,” his days are actually short. It is because of this that materialistic ideologies are able to become entrenched in the world. The remedy lies in the giving of charity (*ibid.*).



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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.