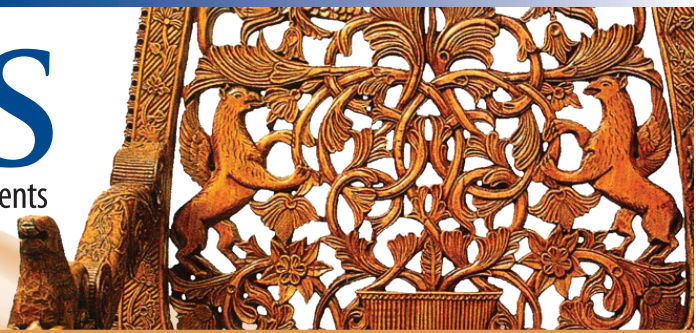


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Freedom for All

By Yossi Katz

“**THE LAND OF** the free and the home of the brave.” If I wouldn’t have known that these words were part of the national anthem, I might think they were sung at the Pesach Seder! After all, on Pesach we celebrate our freedom from servitude – something only achieved by acting brave and courageous.

Our ancestors in Egypt didn’t have it easy. Forced to do backbreaking labor, men were also made to do women’s work and women to do jobs typically performed by men. They were physically abused, deprived of sleep and proper nutrition, and never given a moment’s rest. But these deplorable physical conditions only paralleled the state of their psychological and spiritual strain. Stripped of their identity, without a moment to think and make sense of their lives, they were mentally overwhelmed. No doubt, this also influenced their descent to the 49th level of impurity.

But then, miracle of miracles, at their lowest point – where they were but a hairsbreadth from falling to the 50th level of impurity, from which it would have been impossible to return – they were redeemed with great signs and wonders.

This is not only the story of our ancestors. It is the story of every one of us each year during Pesach. We arrive at the Seder table with our own parcel of problems and stresses. We have work-related difficulties, issues with our relationships and marriages, health concerns, and so on. These “burdens” and their harsh daily toll overwhelm us and force us into spiritual slumber. We don’t even realize that we’re asleep, for we have descended. But then we gather together and begin to tell of our Exodus from *MitZRayiM* (Egypt) – this is also our exit from *MetZaRiM*, the “straits” and pressures of our daily lives.

As we read the words of the Haggadah and perform the mitzvot of Pesach, a Heavenly light shines down on us

and infuses our souls with great spiritual yearning. We may not always merit seeing this light, but our souls are touched by it. We have been freed and now we must run!

The Jews didn’t have time to prepare for their exodus, and neither do we. The freedom of Pesach isn’t something that we initiate and work towards, but a flash miracle that we cannot truly absorb. Now is not the time to begin understanding and explaining all the things that were holding us back. Now is the time to move forward, to begin getting used to living like free men.

Reb Noson teaches that there is but a small difference between *ChaMetZ* (leavening) and *MatZaH* – the difference between the Hebrew letters *chet* (in *Chametz*) and *heh* (in *matzaH*). The letter *chet* is fully enclosed; according to the Kabbalah, it represents *chokhmah* (wisdom). Like a person who thinks he knows everything and can answer every question, even a minuscule amount of this type of wisdom/leavening is what the Torah prohibits on Pesach. The letter *heh*, in contrast, has a small opening and is comprised of the letters *yod* and *dalet*. The *yod* also represents wisdom, but the *dalet* refers to faith. A person who combines faith with wisdom leaves an “opening”: he remains humble while utilizing whatever knowledge he has to further his relationship and faith in God.

This is the secret of true freedom. God is ready and waiting to take us out, but will we let Him in? The choice is ours. We can use our wisdom and knowledge to think that we know it all and can save ourselves ... or we can stop trying to figure everything out and admit that we don’t have the answers to every question, embarking upon a life of turning to God and trusting that He will lead us. Personal freedom comes when we use our intellect to strengthen our faith in God, rather than letting it enslave us in self-delusion.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Giluach 3

A Passover Parable

By Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

Rebbe Nachman told the following parable:

Once a Jew and a German gentile were traveling together as hobos. The Jew told the German to make believe that he was a Jew (since his language was similar [to Yiddish]), and the Jews would have pity on him. Since Pesach was approaching, the Jew taught him how to act (when he is invited to a Seder). He told him that at every Seder, Kiddush is made and the hands are washed. However, he forgot to tell him about the bitter herb.

The German was invited to a house on the first night of Pesach and, being very hungry from all day, looked forward to the fine foods that had been described by the Jew. First they gave him a piece of celery dipped in salt water, and other things served at the Seder. Then they began to recite the Haggadah, and he sat there longing for the meal. When the matzah was served, he was very happy.

Then they gave him a piece of horseradish for the bitter herb. It was bitter to taste, and he thought that this was the entire meal. He ran from the house, bitter and hungry, saying to himself, "Cursed Jews! After all that ceremony, that's all they serve to eat!" He went to the synagogue where he had made up to meet his partner, and fell asleep.

After a while the Jew arrived, happy and full from a good meal. "How was your Seder?" he asked.

The other told him what had happened.

"Stupid German!" replied the Jew. "If you had waited just a little longer, you would have had a fine meal, as I had."

The same is true when one wants to come close to God. After all the effort to begin, one is given a little bitterness. This bitterness is needed to purify the body. But a person may think that this bitterness is all there is to serving God, so he runs away from it. But if he waited a short while and allowed his body to be purified, then he would feel every joy and delight in the world in his closeness to God.

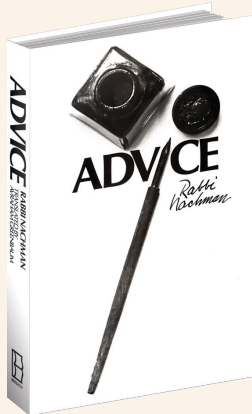
Rebbe Nachman's Stories, Parable #23

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

AWE AND DEVOTION. 28. What profit is there when people run after the superficialities of materialism and gratification and neglect the task of achieving self-perfection? Many people waste away their days struggling to leave a big inheritance for their children. But this is no better than when a person gets himself dirty and then takes more dirt to cover up the dirt. Other people try their best to leave a good name behind them for their children's sake. But this is still not

the real purpose of life. The aim of the true tzaddikim is only to satisfy the will of God (*Likutey Moharan II, 37*).



29. In all situations, the Jew always has the option of exercising free choice. As far as the other nations of the world are concerned, there are certain things that restrict their free will and compel them to act in a particular way.

With a Jew, however, no matter what he does, there is always some devotion involved, something that relates to his service of God. Because of this, the Jew has free will in everything (*ibid. II, 54*).

30. The profit a person can have from this world is indescribable. You don't need to spend your own money to make a profit here. God spreads the opportunities before you and you can simply stretch out your hand and take abundant profit (*ibid. II, 55*).



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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.