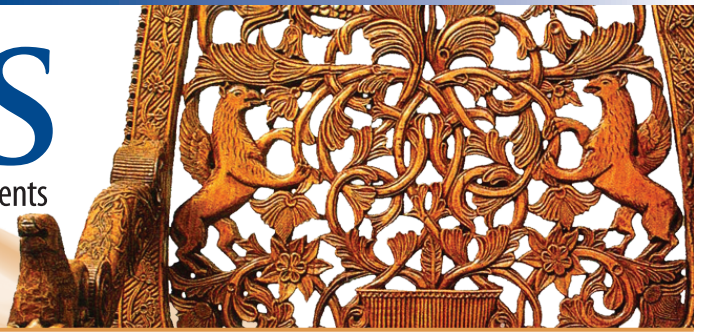


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT KEDOSHIM • 5779 • VOL. 9 NO. 32

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## Fighting is Not a Mitzvah

By Yossi Katz

**WE HEAR ABOUT** it all the time: fighting, arguing, accusing and judging, all supposedly for the sake of Heaven. The excuse is always the same: “Doesn’t it say in the Torah, ‘You shall reprove your brother and not bear a sin because of him’?” (Leviticus 19:17). “Aren’t we obligated to give Mussar?” This is what all our “caring and sincere rabble-rousers” claim!

Today, the old shteibel coffee room chatter has been technologically upgraded. Bloggers and online whistleblowers can post their opinions and so-called reproofs and, within seconds, their often ignorant and destructive comments make their way around the world, being seen by many thousands of people. The amount of damage caused by this is colossal.

This commandment is perhaps the greatest opportunity for our evil inclination to take advantage of a positive mitzvah and use it as a catalyst for sin. It convinces us, “Didn’t he or she do such and such? Surely they should be severely criticized, chastised and possibly even publicly humiliated!” “It’s my obligation on behalf of God Himself!” This mistake is so grave that otherwise well-intentioned people can completely destroy the lives of so many.

No one is perfect and we all have personal shortcomings. But the Torah commands us to look for the good that we also abundantly possess, and judge our fellow Jew positively. If we are to play the part of God, working on judging others (and ourselves) positively must be our top priority.

Yet what about the times that the *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) specifies that we do acknowledge that our fellow Jew has done something wrong? Rabbi Akiva declared in the times of the Talmud, “I doubt there is anyone in this generation who is capable of

giving rebuke!” (*Erkhin* 16b; see *Ein Yaakov*). Rashi explains that the lesson is to never rebuke someone by embarrassing him publicly.

The Talmud further states that if there is a question of rebuking for the sake of Heaven or abstaining because of false humility, it is better to abstain (*ibid.*). Rashi explains that the Talmud is saying it is better to refrain from publicly rebuking an individual even if only because one feels a false sense of humility (i.e. that he isn’t on a high enough level) than to rebuke even for the sake of Heaven!

Is this not so much more true so in our times? Would not Rabbi Akiva have made his statement so much more emphatically?

There is a tremendous mitzvah to speak pleasantly to our friend’s heart and encourage him along the way; our *parashah* commands us to do so. That being said, we must be vigilant to never publicly humiliate anyone, cause embarrassment or, God forbid, resort to fighting, arguments and accusations. Anyone – even rabbis – who stir up arguments and fights are making a terrible mistake and we should stay far away from these elements.

Additionally, Rebbe Nachman once pointed out the example of moving around a foul-smelling object. As long as the object rests in its place, its smell is more or less minimized. However, as soon as one moves the object around, the smell intensifies tremendously. We must be very careful when dealing with our own shortcomings and those of others. Often our main ability is to see the good in others and concentrate on valuing it and judging them positively by it. In this way, we can influence them positively while steering clear of further damage.

The Torah has commanded us to observe the 613 mitzvot. These 613 do not include ANY mitzvah of fighting. May we begin to work on properly keeping these 613 and not on adding any of our own creations.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Yayin Nesach 4*

# Finding the Good

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**ONCE REB NOSON** asked Reb Meir of Teplik about another man from Reb Meir's town. The fellow townsman had recently started coming to learn with Reb Noson, and he wanted to know more about him.

Reb Meir answered in an offhand manner; it was clear that he didn't think much of the man.

"Listen to me," said Reb Noson. "If you view people in a critical manner, you will end up denigrating the whole world. Someone who looks at others in a disparaging manner can literally start at one end of town and judge every Jew unfavorably. Eventually you will conclude that no one is up to par and you are the only genuine Jew in town."

"But I'm also not the way a real Jew should be," sighed Reb Meir.

"If you're not good enough, with all the many positive things you do and all the work you put into yourself, then who is?" Reb Noson concluded.

Reb Noson told Reb Meir to turn off his negative scrutiny and search for the positive instead. "If you see people in an optimal light, focusing on their positive points, you will find good in even the worst individuals. When you look for the good, you will begin to find it in everyone – including yourself!"

On another occasion, Reb Noson gave us an important key to finding the good in others. "I can find merit even in a very wicked person," he said. "I am speaking about finding an abundance of merit, enough to fill many pages. I can do this because I know the terrible hardships that people endure in this life."

Rebbe Nachman once had a follower who had a very difficult time seeing the good in himself. The Rebbe gave him a little push: "Well, according to what you are saying, you have no positive, redeeming feature whatsoever!"

"What do you mean?" the man spluttered. "Surely I am not as bad as that! I certainly have good points."

As soon as the man began to speak about his positive aspects, Rebbe Nachman smiled. "So why do you say you have no good points? You most certainly do, as you just said yourself!"

*Based on Kokhvey Ohr, p. 75.18, p. 74.15*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**ANGER.** 1. You must break the force of your anger with love. If you feel yourself becoming angry, make sure you do nothing unkind because of your anger. You must make a special effort to be kind to the very person you are angry with. Sweeten your anger with kindness.

When you do this, you will be able to draw benefit from the tzaddik and then you will be able to understand the true goal of all things. You will taste the delight of the World to Come, and you will see how everything in the world is part of the movement to this ultimate goal (*Likutey Moharan I, 18:2*).



2. Through breaking the force of anger with love and kindness, the true tzaddikim receive honor and greatness and the world finds a true leader – one who will have pity for the world and lead it in the right way, bringing each individual to his ultimate goal (*ibid.*).

3. Anger and unkindness arise when people's understanding is limited. The deeper their understanding, the more their anger disappears, and kindness, love and peace spread. This is why the study of Torah, which deepens the understanding, brings love and peace into the world and banishes anger (*ibid. I, 56:6*).

4. Immersing in the mikvah is also an antidote to anger, because immersing in the mikvah brings understanding (*ibid. I, 56:7*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*