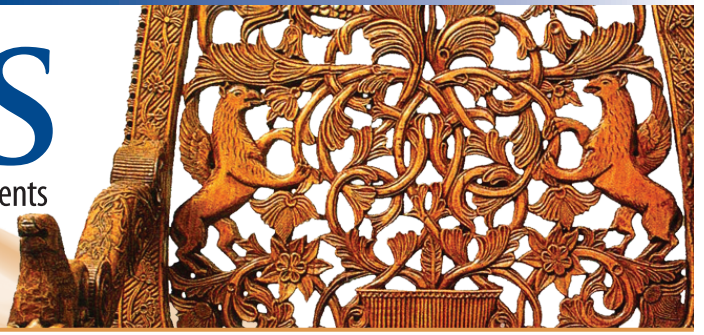


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Why Do We Sin?

By Yossi Katz

YES, IT'S THAT time of year again. Elul is upon us, and considering that we are seriously aspiring to engage in *teshuvah* (return to God), it may be high time to ask this fundamental question.

You're probably thinking the simple answer is that we sin because we just don't care, or at least we lack sufficient interest to do what the Torah deems proper. Wrong!

Shockingly, Reb Noson says that the majority of our wrongdoing actually comes about because we want too much, not too little.

Before God created our world, His Infinite Light filled all of existence. But God desired to make room for us and our freedom of choice. Therefore He created an Empty Space (so to speak), which gave us the room to "co-exist." This Empty Space allowed His Kingship to be affirmed even where He was most hidden – thus bringing about the ultimate manifestation of His greatness.

Each of us is considered a unique universe. Our personal "creation" includes both the Infinite Light and the Empty Space. The Infinite Light is our burning inner-desire to cleave to spirituality. We naturally demand perfection in our service of God. We believe we must perform acts of kindness or study Torah flawlessly. The desire to jump into a mitzvah or a new resolution and complete it with gusto stems from the force of our burning inner-desire.

But what starts as a noble enterprise often ends in failure. We intend to do some good deed, but invest too much of ourselves in it and end up feeling burnt out. Or the opposite—we desire to serve God with such perfection that we give up before we even try. We often feel a lack of interest in spiritual pursuits because we've set the bar too high, leading to the conclusion, "Why bother?" Then our potential energy gets misdirected and leads us

to sin and to desire illicit things. Yes, we do have to burn with passion and desire to cleave to God, but this energy must be channeled the right way. How do we do that?

We must create an Empty Space within ourselves. An Empty Space is an inner-filtration system, a "cooling-off" place in which we can mitigate our burning, holy desire and harness its energy for good. An Empty Space allows us to grow step by step, with the patience necessary to endure a lasting, positive *teshuvah*.

As always, our guides in this endeavor are the tzaddikim. The Torah illuminates everything, but not always do we understand its directives. Sometimes we focus on the wrong parts and take Torah teachings the wrong way. Therefore, Reb Noson compares God's Torah to the Infinite Light. We need the tzaddikim to "filter" the Torah's messages to us, showing us the right way to follow it. The tzaddikim can also teach us how to serve God with our burning inner-desire, while filtering our energy in a positive and efficient way.

As our *parashah* says, "You should not divert from the word they [the tzaddikim] tell you, either right or left" (Deuteronomy 17:11). "Right" means rushing to do what is perceived as righteous and holy. "Left" means doing less than required, slacking off.

It's a delicate balance, but one that is crucial for our spiritual success. By growing in a measured way, we emulate the ultimate purpose of Creation. We aren't serving God while being blinded by His Infinite Light and lacking free will. Rather, we're enduring the filters of life's challenges and growing pains to reveal that all of Creation, including the necessary "breathing room," attests to His sovereignty.

As we begin to prepare for Rosh HaShanah and the coronation of the King, may we begin to truly see His loving hand in every detail of our lives. Amen.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Nedarim 3

The Dust of Mitzvot

By Gedaliah Fleer

REBBE NACHMAN SAID that a poor person is closer to God because he recognizes how much he has to rely on God for his every need. In fact, it would be a good thing if his followers were not wealthy. “Still,” Rebbe Nachman continued, “in each generation there will be a few of my people who will be wealthy enough to help others.”

Reb Moshe Yuroslovski was such a man.

He distributed enormous sums to charity, as well as to the printing of Rebbe Nachman’s books. He would arrive in Uman quite a while before Rosh HaShanah, rent an enormous hall, and prepare a large amount of food. He would then announce that anyone who wished to spend the month of Elul in Uman, preparing himself spiritually for Rosh HaShanah by praying at the Rebbe’s grave and in the Breslover *kloyz* (synagogue), could be his guest and eat his food. Hundreds of people came to Uman in Elul, and Reb Moshe also arranged places for them to sleep.

Once there wasn’t enough flour in Uman to prepare challahs for Rosh HaShanah. Reb Moshe traveled to a nearby city to obtain flour. He bought two sacks, and on the eve of the holiday found himself at the train station, waiting for the last train back to Uman.

At the station, Reb Moshe noticed other Breslover chassidim who were also on their way to Uman. He asked them to help carry the heavy sacks on to the train, but the chassidim were afraid they would miss the crowded train, and refused.

Reb Moshe told the chassidim that this was for the Rebbe’s Rosh HaShanah. “And if you don’t want to help me,” he added, “then let me tell you that, God willing, I will make it to Uman, but you will not.”

That is exactly what happened. The train was completely filled with passengers, but since everyone was afraid of getting dirty from the sacks of flour that Reb Moshe was carrying, they moved aside to make room for him to enter. The others, however, couldn’t get in.

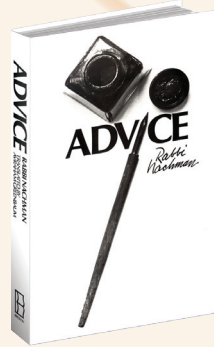
This story shows that when a person wants to do a mitzvah with his whole heart and is willing to act with self-sacrifice, God helps him accomplish his goal.

From “Against All Odds”

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD. 10. Whenever a person falls from his level, the fundamental reason is always the desire for money. ... For the same reason, when the enemies of the tzaddik stir up opposition against him, and God wants to chase them away, He causes them to fall into lust for money. There is no greater fall than this.



As a general rule, in times of controversy and strife, the greater the purity with which a person guards the covenant and the closer he is to the tzaddik, the greater his

power to resist his opponents and throw them down. And when they fall, it is into lust for money. Thus, one who finds himself involved in a dispute should be very careful not to succumb to the temptations of wealth (*Likutey Moharan I*, 23:3).

11. The mitzvah of mezuzah is a remedy for the lust for money. When you observe this mitzvah carefully, your livelihood will fly into your hands! (*ibid. I*, 23:4).

12. As long as a person is reluctant to spend money on the mitzvot he performs, his mitzvot are deficient because they have not yet entered the category of true faith. When a mitzvah is so precious in his eyes that he doesn’t mind parting with his money and spends liberally for the sake of the mitzvah, this is called faith. For the essence of a person’s faith is seen in his relation to money (*ibid. I*, 23:5).



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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.