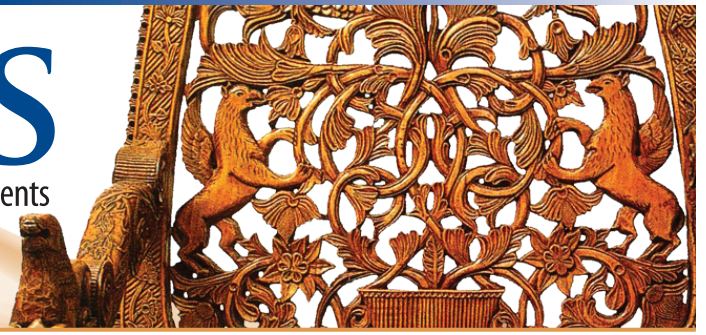


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Take Back the Tears

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF THE most curious parts of this week's *parashah* has to do with the Torah's description of two of our Matriarchs. While running away from his evil, murderous brother Esau, Jacob also seeks to find the righteous marriage partner with whom he will establish the Twelve Tribes of Israel. He meets Rachel and immediately realizes that she is this special one. However, there is actually an older sister, Leah. Although Leah was the proposed match for Esau, through her relentless, tearful prayers she succeeded in reversing her fortune and would now marry Jacob, too.

The Torah describes their striking difference in appearance: "Leah's eyes were tender [weak], but Rachel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion" (Genesis 29:17). This description of Leah's eyes seems to imply something negative, but our Sages interpret it as a compliment. If it's positive, why did the Torah find it necessary to describe Leah's appearance in a seemingly negative light?

Before the universe was created, there was only Oneness. Falsehood and illusions could not exist in the truth of God's Oneness. However, in order to allow for the possibility of free will, God created the world in a way that He became hidden, allowing a perceived separation between His Oneness and "life" in general. Now there was an illusion of our existence being a free-standing, independent experience.

Esau lived in this independent, material bubble. He recognized that Isaac had the ability to bless him with tremendous bounty, but his overindulgence in material pleasures blinded him to the spiritual purpose of the blessing. Instead, he focused only on the illusory self-gratification that this world had to offer. He divorced his existence from God's Oneness as the Source of everything in creation.

Leah was a spiritual giant. She understood what Esau was all about and wanted no part of him. But what was she to

do? She was destined to marry him. So Leah attacked the source of Esau's behavior. The eyes represent seeing not just in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense. We each have the ability to rise above the physical nature of this world to see God's Providence in our lives. Our every experience is brought about through His direct influence. By living with this understanding, we can connect this world back to God's original Oneness.

Yet the falsehoods of this world often deceive us into separating from God's Oneness. Then God becomes hidden from us. When this occurs, our existence feels purposeless, and life and its challenges become overbearing. We become sad and shed tears. God's Providence that had lit up our eyes gets washed away in these tears and we become glassy-eyed, no longer able to see and experience Him.

Esau cried because he lost his material blessings and his self-indulgent existence was now in a sad state. Leah cried because she did not want to be part of his life of separation from God's Oneness. Through her Heaven-bound tears, Leah reconnected the existence that Esau had divorced from God and redeemed the light of Providence that was washed away by his tears. She thus fulfilled whatever connection with Esau she was destined to have, and was no longer bound to him.

Leah's appearance is described through the negative of crying because a person cries when he is separated from the joyful state of God's Oneness. Because her fate was joined with Esau's, Leah was seemingly bound to that "existence." But we learn from her response that when we have separated from God and fallen into a state of disconnect and sadness, our very tears contain the washed away light of God's Providence. This is because God is never truly hidden from us; it's just an illusion of this world. By taking back those tears and now crying to God with the hope that He reveals Himself to us once again, we reconnect our existence to God's Oneness and are now able to experience the greatness of His blessings. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 3

Spirituality First

By Chaim Kramer

ONCE MOSHE LANDAU, a wealthy follower of Rebbe Nachman, returned from a business trip to Berditchov. Hearing that Reb Noson was in town, he went to see him straightaway without even going home first.

Reb Noson received him warmly. Then, as usual, he began lecturing Landau about the importance of serving God rather than running after one's worldly desires, which all lead to nothing anyway since the material world is full of sorrow.

Landau smiled and said, "I have just come back from Berditchov with some beautiful merchandise. I'm perfectly comfortable. What could be wrong with this world?"

Reb Noson replied, "A man could return from a successful business trip and bring expensive presents for his family. He might even bring his wife an exquisite gold ring. But she may not like it, and she'll start an argument, and he'd rather be dead than alive."

Landau, who had indeed bought his wife a ring, went home to give it to her. Just as Reb Noson had said, she was extremely unhappy with her gift and started such an argument that Landau came running back to Reb Noson, saying, "Oy! Were you right!"

* *

In the town of Uman lived a man known as Reb Isaac. A wealthy businessman and a Breslover chassid, he was very involved with charity to the community of Breslover chassidim. Yet he began suffering reversals of his fortune and experienced several heavy financial losses. He understood that spirituality came before financial success, and attributed his losses to God's way of making him more involved with spiritual growth. But he was afraid of poverty.

Well-versed in Rebbe Nachman's teachings about the effectiveness of prayer, Reb Isaac went to Rebbe Nachman's grave and cried, "Rebbe! I know what is wanted of me. But I don't want it! I don't want it!" Shortly afterward, his "wheel of fortune" began ascending again and he became very, very wealthy.

Reb Isaac never forgot what almost happened to him, and became even more charitable than before. Aside from the many families and individuals he supported, he also rebuilt the Breslover *kloyz* (synagogue) in the early 1900s, a building that still stands to this day.

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD. 35. The lust for money creates enemies. The stronger the craving, the stronger the enemies become. If the craving becomes excessive, it will create enemies who hate one for nothing (*Likutey Moharan I, 68.*).

36. The more a person craves money, the more turbulent and confused his mind becomes. Eventually he turns into a fool (*ibid.*).

37. When a person is meek and humble no one can "shift him from his place" in the sense of impinging on his livelihood (*ibid. I, 79.*).

38. When a person conducts his business with faith and honesty, he thereby fulfills the commandment to "love the Lord your God" and his income will be sent to him without worry and toil (*ibid. I, 93; 210.*).

39. While a person is working, he should bind his thoughts to Torah alone, particularly to the laws clothed within the activities in which he is engaged (*ibid. I, 280.*).

40. One who fails to bind his thoughts to Torah in the course of his business activities will eventually be punished by having to come before the judges in a case based on Torah law. The outcome will depend on the degree of his previous neglect. Sometimes the punishment is merely having to undergo the trial, and the person wins his case. But where people have allowed their business activities to diverge too far from Torah teachings, it usually happens that they lose their case (*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.