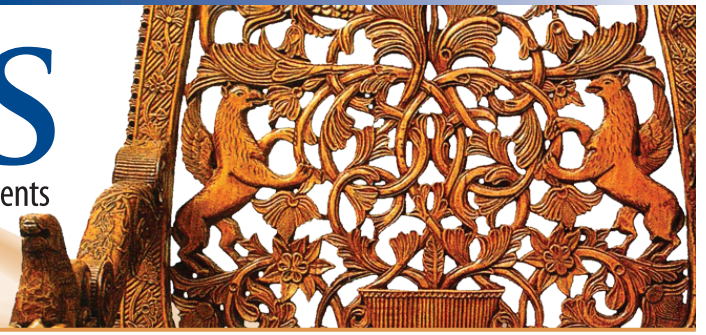


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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#ThankYouHashem

By Yossi Katz

IT HAS BECOME the latest and greatest movement, generating a plethora of “Thank You Hashem” themed clothing, bumper stickers and emojis. What a wonderful idea! Gratitude is one of humanity’s core principles, something we should all cultivate and express.

Yet while it’s easy and worthy to thank God when things go well, we must also believe that challenges and even misfortune are for our best. As Nachum Ish Gamzu famously proclaimed, “This too is for the best.” We must exercise our faith that however difficult our issues, they are custom-tailored for us, helping us grow and blossom. Nothing is for naught and certainly not to our detriment.

For those who internalize this belief and live in this manner, God appreciates their faith to the utmost degree. But what about those who are in pain, who suffer and don’t understand why God has acted with such strictness and judgment against them? Must they ignore their inner turmoil and force their thanks onto a God Who feels so distant and removed? Is God just waiting for their thanks so He can miraculously transform their sorrow into deliverance?

The very nature of the festival of Chanukah, which occurred during the Second Temple era, answers these questions.

While receiving permission to build the second Holy Temple was a tremendous blessing for the Jews, the structure itself was a temporary stopgap. The Holy of Holies in the Second Temple was completely barren of its Ark, *Kapporet* (Covering) and *Keruvim* (Yoma 21b). Therefore God’s Presence did not rest there as in the First Temple. The name *Chanukah* means “dedication,” and the holiday celebrates the rededication of this structure. But if the Holy Temple was anyway incomplete, why

was there such great cause for celebration? And if it was known that this building was only a precursor to the later, eternal Holy Temple, why did God bother to perform so many miracles to restore it?

Each day of Chanukah, we sing *Hallel* (praise) to God. And during the *Al HaNissim* prayer, we thank God for His many miracles, concluding, “[Our Sages] instituted these eight days of Chanukah to give thanks and praise to Your great Name.” The word *Chanukah* is related to the word *chinuch* (education). Chanukah teaches us how to live with thankfulness and gratitude.

Because life is full of challenges and difficult moments, the *yetzer hara* tries to lump all of our problems on us at one time. No person can withstand the mental anguish of dealing with everything at once. But if instead one chooses to think back on the many times God helped and saved him under similar circumstances, he will become hopeful again. If he examines his current predicament and finds some silver lining or measure of consolation, he will be further filled with hope. And when he thanks God for what he can objectively see, even in his present cloudy state, he creates breathing room. He can now once again feel God’s presence in his life.

Now he can turn to God and in sincere prayer ask Him for help with his present pain. “Thank You Hashem” is not a miracle trick, but a means to effectuate honest and humanistic prayer.

This is why the salvation of Chanukah took place during the Second Temple era, in-between the eras of our two great enemies, Babylonia and Rome. God performed so many miracles in order to teach us to see and be thankful for even a temporary reprieve. Then we can feel God even in our pain, and summon the strength to pray for our future salvation and, ultimately, the building of the eternal Holy Temple. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Kilai Beheimah #4

Look for the Good!

HOW OFTEN DO we look down on others, thinking they are not behaving the way they should? And how many times do we look down on ourselves, feeling that we'll never overcome our bad habits and self-defeating behaviors?

Rebbe Nachman gave us a powerful tool to counteract these thoughts: “*Azamra!*” (I will sing!) (*Likutey Moharan I*, 282). In this lesson, he explains that all we need to do is search for the good points. Everyone has at least one good point; even the most hardened criminal once held the door open for his mother, or gave a coin to charity. When you find one good point, look for another, and another. Thus you elevate yourself and others to the side of merit, enabling everyone to return to God.

Reb Noson writes:

The Rebbe told me he had been speaking with someone who was complaining bitterly about how terrible his behavior was. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days had turned into years and he had still not managed to extricate himself from his bad ways. But each time he would try even harder to control himself, and he was always struggling to get closer to God.

As the man complained how terribly he behaved, the Rebbe answered with great wisdom, saying in a tone of sincerity and simplicity: “Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad.”

At this the man got excited and said to the Rebbe, “But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew.”

“Only the slightest bit,” answered the Rebbe. He then told the man to make it a practice to go with the teaching of *Azamra!*

I understood the Rebbe to mean that this was precisely how he revived this man. He had already fallen so low in his own estimation that it was not possible to revive him with anything. It was only when the Rebbe told him that he was totally bad that he was startled and became excited. Then he started feeling a little of the holiness of the good points still inside him. Then the Rebbe told him to go with the lesson of *Azamra!*

Based on Tzaddik #569

Dedicated in the Memory of (L'ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

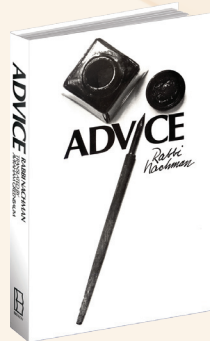
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD. 44. There is a certain sin which causes people to fall into debt. One who is in debt should repent wholeheartedly and plead with God to cleanse him of this sin (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #112).

45. When a person has such joy from Torah and mitzvot that he literally dances for joy, his material affairs are elevated (*Likutey Moharan II*, 81).

46. Whether you have money or not, don't worry about it, because if you do you will surely waste away your days, regardless of whether you actually make any money or not. This world is completely deceptive. It constantly makes people think they are gaining, but in the end it is all an illusion. Even if you do become rich, eventually you will be taken away from your money. It is a basic rule that man and money cannot remain together. Either the money is taken from the man or the man is taken from the money. ...

Your one aim and desire should be to reach the ultimate goal of the World to Come. Always long to do what God wants. Whatever good you can do besides – a good deed here, learning some Torah or saying a prayer there – all the better. ... The only thing that will be left of all your labor in this world will be your will to do good and whatever holy deeds you were able to snatch in this world while you were here (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #51).



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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.