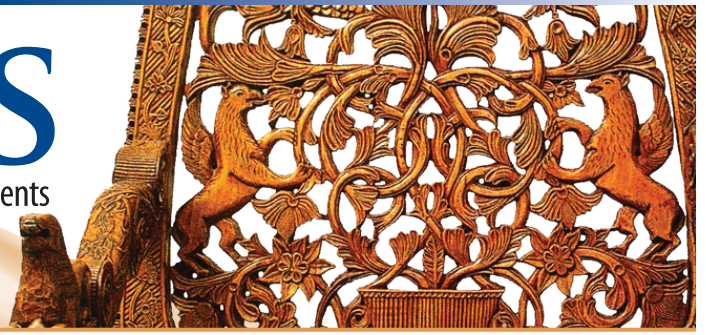


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Getting Past the Clouds

By Yossi Katz

I PERSONALLY DON'T like cold weather. Growing up in Toronto, I remember walking home from school in the icy, cold and already darkening afternoon hours. Even today, as I sit in my warm minivan, when the forecast predicts wintry weather, I begin to brainstorm ways of getting to Florida in a jiffy. It's just a two-and-a-half-hour flight to paradise. Although I never end up making it there, just the thought that it's warm somewhere in the world gives a certain comfort.

This is not only true of the weather, but also of our spiritual “forecast” and outlook. We all love warm, sunny days with a clear blue sky and a gentle breeze. Wouldn't it be nice to have these kinds of days when we're trying to grow spiritually as well?

Picture the perfect day. You wake up in the morning and give heartfelt thanks to God for restoring your special *neshamah* (soul). You begin the day with sincere prayer and inspirational Torah study. You are both productive and diligent at work while finding deep meaning and connection with what you're doing. You remember to make time for your family and community. You also work on your character traits and, of course, avoid ever becoming angry, jealous or arrogant.

But when was the last time you actually had a day like that? Why do our days seem to always get so cloudy and murky? We all want to live this way, but “stuff happens” and we lose focus and fall back down to “reality.”

One of Rebbe Nachman's basic teachings is the concept of *yeridah tachlit aliyah* (falling for the purpose of rising). This means that although we perceive we are spiritually falling, in actuality, we are being prepared for our future spiritual ascent.

In our *parashah*, Jacob has suffered for many years because he was under the impression that his beloved son Joseph had died. One day he receives word that tells him he's been mistaken all this time. Joseph is alive and well, and is viceroy of Egypt! Jacob is jubilant, and desires to immediately see his son.

But he is also afraid. Joseph lives in Egypt and Jacob resides in the Land of Israel. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim* (constrictions), alluding to the bitter constraints of the exile. It is a place of darkness, a cloudy and cold place. Since hearing the good news, Jacob has been overjoyed and the prophecy that left him because of his depressed state has been restored. How can he now go “down” to Egypt? God reveals to him, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back up” (Genesis 46:4).

God is always with us, even when we feel that we are distant. Wherever a Jew goes, God is always there with him. Perhaps to us it looks like a cold and cloudy day, but we fail to see the sun behind the clouds. Only God knows what is best for us, and that what we perceive to be bitter and painful is actually therapeutic and healthy.

Furthermore, God does not conceal Himself for one extra second. Just as the moon, at its darkest moment, is really renewing itself so that it can wax full and bright in the nighttime sky once again, so God acts with us. We think that it is too late, that things are too difficult, that we've made too many mistakes and the day has already been wasting. Don't throw in the towel! Hold on just a little bit longer and you will discover that God has been with you the entire time, and that all of your difficulties were only paving the way for incredible spiritual growth and inner meaning.

Based on Likutey Halakhot V, p. 286-144a-288

A Master of Advice

By Ozer Bergman

REB SHIMSHON BARSKI (1873-1935) was a leader of the Breslover chassidim in prewar Uman. His entire approach to Judaism was unpressured, unhurried, dignified and patient, as we would expect from a descendant of the Rebbe. Reb Shimshon didn't waste words, always speaking to the point. When he spoke, he spoke softly, but with directives that were consistent, clear, and left no room for uncertainty. Yet he didn't "tie the ropes of connection" so tightly that they choked the spirit of those who sought his advice.

Reb Shimshon had great influence on Breslovers near and far. His gentle ways attracted many to Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Because he behaved so wisely, he greatly influenced many who came to the Breslov synagogue in Uman, even the unlettered. He avoided controversy and advised others to do the same.

For example, when people wanted to remove someone from the synagogue because of his overenthusiastic praying, Reb Shimshon said, "Believe me, he disturbs me, too, with his clapping and shouting. But I'm afraid to say anything to him – maybe he's sincere."

He often said, "Anger accomplishes nothing. The truth does not become known through anger."

When people questioned a suggestion he gave them, he often commented, "I'm not spouting this from a book as others might. I'm telling you this from my personal experience. The only thing that kept me going through all I've suffered is Rebbe Nachman's advice."

Reb Shimshon encouraged those who wrote to him to tell him how their spiritual life was. He would ask each one if he had a partner for studying Rebbe Nachman's teachings and if he had a regular Torah-study program. Reb Shimshon showed special concern for the converts to Judaism who had become Breslovers.

After the Russian Revolution, the borders were closed and travel to Uman for Rosh HaShanah was impossible. The Breslover chassidim in Poland arranged to pray together in Lublin. Reb Shimshon was asked for his opinion about the gathering.

He said, "The gathering in Poland is a good thing because it allows a person to pray carefully and enthusiastically. However, regarding the tikkun of Rosh HaShanah, one must continue to long to be in Uman because Rebbe Nachman's Rosh HaShanah is only there, and nowhere else."

From "A Bit More Advice"

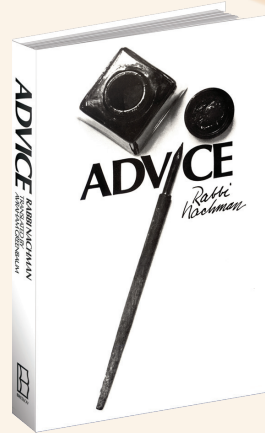
Dedicated in the Memory of (L'ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES. 3. When a person admits unholy thoughts to his mind, the holiness of his mind is reduced in direct proportion to the space occupied by these degraded thoughts. If you stick a pole in a river bed, all kinds of dirt and filth gather round it. In the same way, all kinds of bad characteristics develop because of these unholy ideas, and the mind is assailed with desires and temptations. In fact, all the sins a person does are ultimately caused by the unholy ideas he originally admitted to his mind. To achieve true repentance, you must rid your mind of these thoughts. The mind is the soul, and when a person sanctifies his mind, he elevates and returns everything to its root. This is the essence of repentance (*Likutey Moharan I, 35:1*).

4. Unholy thoughts are the "folly of the heart." When a person dwells on such thoughts, his heart becomes sullied and the "foreskin of the heart" grows thick. The "void" of the creation is spoiled, and it is as if this person had damaged the whole world. But when he thinks good thoughts, the creation is restored. When one purifies his heart and expels all unholy thoughts from his mind, thinking only good thoughts, he can bring about real miracles (*ibid. I, 49:1*).



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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.