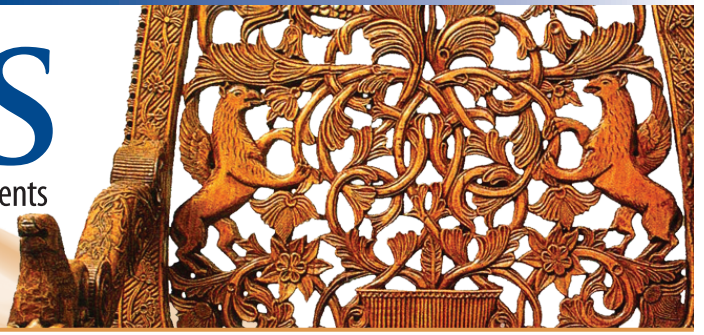


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT SHEMOT • 5780 • VOL. 10 NO. 13

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Grab on to the Good

By Yossi Katz

AM I IN EXILE? Please take a moment to stop and consider this question. As we begin the Book of Exodus, the story of our nation's exile and eventual redemption unfolds. While we are familiar with these events and understand their historical significance, it's important to put ourselves in our ancestor's shoes and relive these episodes since we face these exact spiritual circumstances today.

At any given moment, we are in one of two spiritual states: *galut* (exile) or *geulah* (redemption). Exile signifies the times when God's presence is hidden from us; we feel callous and cold vis-à-vis our relationship with Him. Redemption refers to when we feel God in our lives, have great spiritual aspirations, and fill our lives with Torah and prayer.

Each Jew is entrusted with an awesome *neshamah* (soul), reflective of their Divine portion from Above. When we live with an awareness of our inner reality, we naturally connect with God in our every encounter. At home, work and synagogue, each experience is another opportunity to emulate our Divine source and act in a meaningful, selfless way. However, when we are tested and fall prey to selfish human desires, our true nature becomes hidden from us. This results in feelings of depression and sadness. We become enslaved to our emotional state and our perception of our lives and self is obscured.

This is the deeper meaning of our *parashah*. "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). The evil inclination is called "an old and foolish king" (see Rashi on Ecclesiastes 4:13). "Old" – because as soon as a baby is born, it is embodied with materialistic desires. "Foolish king" – because it rules over man and convinces him to make foolish choices. "Joseph" is the tzaddik within each one of us. When do we fall to exile? When we are in a state of *meitzar* (constriction; from the same root as *Mitzrayim*, Egypt). When our perception

of ourselves and our recognition of the Joseph inside us is constricted, we lose touch with our inner goodness and our connection with God is severed. Our life becomes a shallow and dreary existence. Therefore the evil inclination is also called "a new king," because it relentlessly renews its efforts to thwart our recognition of our true and essential identity.

"They embittered their lives with hard labor" (Exodus 1:15). When one forgets his essence, he falls to a state of *avodah kashah* (hard labor). The *Zohar* (*Bereishit* 27a) relates that *kasha* alludes to *kushya*, the exhaustive state of questions and doubts one now experiences; we become so emotionally overwhelmed that we cannot serve God and properly perform mitzvot.

However, hope is never lost. While Pharaoh wanted to finish us off by drowning the newborns in the Nile, Shifrah and Puah, the Jewish midwives, came to the rescue. Shifrah was the great tzaddeket Jochebed, who is so called because she would beautify (*mishaperet*) the newborns. Puah was the tzaddeket Miriam, who would soothe and coo (*puah*) to the babies (*Sotah* 11b). Though we may feel as dirty and repugnant as a newborn baby, crying out from a distressed soul, the tzaddikim beautify us by teaching us to see our innate goodness and soothe us with their encouragement.

This is what God demonstrated to Moses when Moses spoke ill of the Jewish People. Although Moses' staff was transformed into a snake, which represented the primordial Serpent, he was told to pick it up by its tail and the snake was transformed back into the "staff of God." If we are essentially good, even if we have fallen to a place of evil, it's easy to redeem the soul within us. All we must do is grab on to the tail – to a single, remote speck of goodness within us – and we will be transported from a place of darkness and doubt to a place of light and clarity. When our essence is experienced even in small measure, the time for our redemption has begun.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Eiruvey Techumim 6

Simple Acts

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN ALWAYS taught his students that their main focus in prayer should be on the straightforward meaning of the words. Even those who studied Kabbalah were discouraged from veering from the plain meaning of the prayers during the act of prayer itself.

When asked by an advanced student what particular meditation he should have in mind when saying a particular Divine Name, Rebbe Nachman wondered aloud, “God’ is not enough for you?”

This was Rebbe Nachman’s approach to prayer, and also to mitzvot in general. To act with directness and simplicity, to pray and carry out mitzvot purely as a means of fulfilling God’s will.

When Rebbe Nachman was a young child and found himself gifted with a coin, he would hurry to change it into smaller coins, into pennies. He would then steal into the synagogue—sometimes even through the window—so that no one would see him. Quietly and stealthily, he would take out a *Shaarey Tzion* prayerbook, which included all kinds of additional prayers and supplications for different times and events, and very sweetly recite the *LeShem Yichud* prayer that is said by some prior to performing a mitzvah. Making sure he was not being observed, he would then sidle over to the charity box and deposit one penny.

As soon as he had dropped the coin into the box, he immediately went back to his *Shaarey Tzion* prayerbook, recited the *LeShem Yichud*, and went to give another penny to charity. He did this again and again, with no less enthusiasm each time, until every single coin had found its way into the charity box.

Rebbe Nachman knew the value of every mitzvah-act, and he took this outlook with him as he grew: to invest in the simple acts, and to do as many of them as possible.

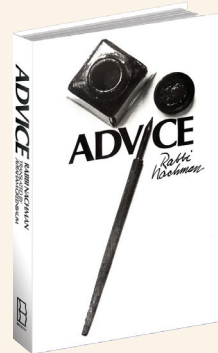
Similarly, Rebbe Nachman encouraged his students to sing all of the Shabbat songs at the meals “like simple Jews do,” and not to feel that it was somehow a waste of time that could be better spent some other way. “Singing all of the Shabbat songs saves one’s children from following the path away from Yiddishkeit! We sing from the simple joy of being Jewish!”

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 115-117

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES. 8. Many people experience very strong mental distractions while they are trying to pray. These can be immoral fantasies or even thoughts about idolatrous worship. There are even cases where people see vivid images of idolatrous objects, or else they experience overwhelming temptations the very moment they stand up to pray. They try to push these thoughts out of their minds by tossing their heads from



side to side. But the harder they try, the more the thoughts press in. This is the nature of thoughts like these. The more worked up you get about trying to push them out of your mind, the more they insinuate their way in.

The best way to deal with them is simply to ignore them. Act as if you were completely unconcerned. Refuse to listen. Carry on with what you were doing – studying,

praying, working or whatever. Pay no attention to the thoughts or fantasies at all. Don’t keep on looking round to see if they have gone away. Just carry on with what you are trying to do. In the end, they will go away of their own accord.

But you should understand that this method is only a temporary measure. In the long term, the task is to sanctify and purify your body. To achieve this, you must go to the tzaddikim to learn the paths of truth. Thoughts like these will then disappear completely (*Likutey Moharan I, 72*).



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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.