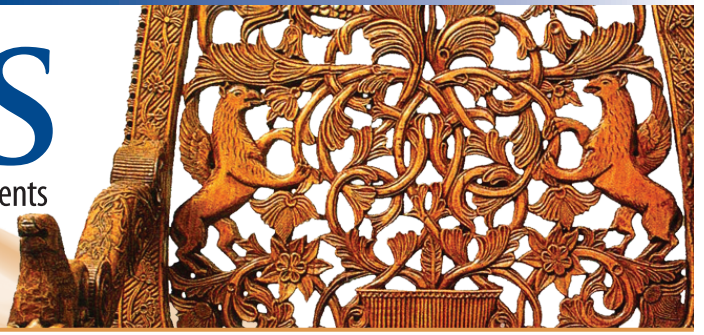


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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All's Right in the End

By Yossi Katz

“PHARAOH HARDENED HIS HEART” (Exodus 7:22).

Ever since Adam ate from the forbidden fruit, God has been acting to fix this world and bring it to its ultimate perfection. Destiny is nothing more than the progress toward human perfection. Ultimately, everything will turn out exactly as God planned and willed. Therefore even the actions of the wicked do not affect His design in the slightest. The Divine blueprint is very profound and God is able to manipulate everything according to His ultimate plan.

Nevertheless, it is absolutely forbidden to violate any law of the Torah. We often fail to realize how important and powerful we truly are. By breaking a Torah law, we cause damage to all of the upper worlds and bring about much spiritual destruction. Unless a person sincerely regrets his past actions and changes his ways, a time of reckoning will be had in order to cleanse him from the spiritual filth he has created.

Notwithstanding this, God's blueprint for the world remains intact and God will finish exactly as He planned. It is absolutely impossible for us to understand how this is possible – for on the one hand, He is in control, while on the other hand, we have freedom of choice. However, this is one of the fundamental principles that Rebbe Nachman taught us.

We do find many examples of actions that violate the Torah and yet fulfill the desire of God. In this week's *parashah*, Pharaoh hardened his heart against the clear demonstration of God's sovereignty through the Ten Plagues. But each time he refused to listen and let the Jews leave, it led to a greater sanctification of God's Name through the miraculous display of yet another plague.

Similarly, Pharaoh's intent to destroy the Jewish nation through harsh bondage resulted in the Jews becoming humbled enough to receive the Torah.

Precisely because God is so lofty and can manipulate the world to bring it to its ultimate perfection, we always have the ability to do *teshuvah* (repentance). Even if someone were to transgress the entire Torah a thousand times, God forbid, God remains above it all and no harm will come to His ultimate plan. Therefore we should never give up hope! God waits patiently for us to show genuine remorse and regret. Then He will guide the world in a way that our past misdeeds will somehow be transformed to fix the world.

As Rebbe Nachman declared, “There is a way that everything can become for the best!”

Based on this concept, Reb Yitzchak Breiter writes:

Know and understand that everything that happens to us, both spiritually and materially – including what we ourselves do, whether deliberately or unwittingly, willfully or under compulsion – all comes about through the decree of God. Even if you want to accomplish something holy, if you are not yet sufficiently worthy and have not sanctified yourself enough to achieve it, Heaven arranges things in such a way that you get distracted from it. Some idea gets implanted in your mind that prevents you from carrying out the holy deed, even if you want to. This is not because God wants to take revenge, but because of His love. ...

The thing to do is cry out to God about all the wrong you have done. Tell God everything. Pour out your heart to Him and plead with Him for your very life. Ask Him to help you get nearer your holy goal. God's way of dealing with us in this respect is one of His most amazing wonders. His understanding of us and our needs is perfect (*Seven Pillars of Faith*, Pillar #1).

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Simaney Beheimah
VeChayah 4*

Down with Negativity!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

AT TIMES REBBE NACHMAN reminisced about the challenges he faced in his spiritual growth in his youth.

He would speak about the obstacles he had faced, the times he felt he wasn't progressing despite his strong desire to learn and connect with God. Even so, he always encouraged himself and refused to give up. Early in his life, he developed the habit of always making a fresh start.

That kind of thinking is rare in young people — both because it doesn't come naturally to them, and because the adults around them don't encourage them to think that way.

Even with Rebbe Nachman's mature way of thinking, he felt that an outside source of support would have helped him immeasurably in his youth. As he put it, "If only I had had someone to encourage me not to give in, telling me to make every effort, no matter what ... I would have accomplished in a day what took me a year!"

Negative thinking is so pervasive. It's all too easy to sap ourselves of vital energy as we focus on our faults and failings. Hyper-focusing on what's broken gets in the way of making the repairs. Rebbe Nachman strongly advised against wallowing in that kind of self-censure. "Don't let your smallness get in the way of your greatness!" he would cry.

If someone really is trapped in negative behaviors, from where should he draw the encouragement to shake them off? Rebbe Nachman taught that even such a person should never give up. Instead, he should delve into the ideas that the Rebbe shared in the lesson *Azamra!* (I Will Sing!) (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282). Rebbe Nachman enjoined his followers to live by this teaching.

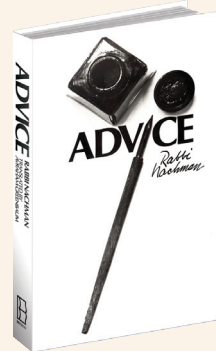
Once, one of Rebbe Nachman's students appealed to him for help in changing his negative attitudes and actions. "How am I ever going to get out of the mess that I'm in?" he asked. Rebbe Nachman replied, "You need to do whatever good you can. As long as you persist in doing whatever good you can — as long as you're diligent at it — the bad will eventually fall away and only the good will remain."

Based on Shivtey HaRan #6; Siach Sarfey Kodesh II:34

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES. 9. If you allow yourself to be depressed about these kinds of thoughts, it simply feeds them with more fuel. It's no good being upset or afraid of them. Just don't pay any attention to them. Try to be cheerful. Eventually these thoughts will disappear automatically. Don't keep testing to see if they're still there. It won't help if you keep on turning round to look. Just don't pay any attention to them at all (*Likutey Moharan* I, 72).



10. The Torah distinguishes between the animals that are pure and those that are impure. The "pure animals" are pure thoughts; the "impure animals" are impure thoughts. The battle between the different thoughts in a person's mind is a battle between the pure and the impure animals. Heaven allows them to carry on fighting because God has great pleasure

when He sees a man struggling hard to defeat these "wild animals" (*ibid.* I, 233).

11. The simple fact is that it's impossible for two thoughts to be in the mind at one and the same time. It's therefore an easy matter to rid yourself of bad thoughts by being quite passive. Simply don't think them. Think something else instead — think about Torah or devotion to God, or even about your work, and so on. If you just turn your mind to something else, the bad thoughts and fantasies will go away automatically (*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.