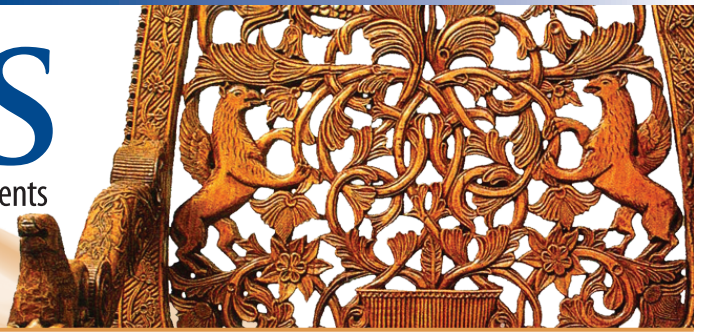


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Striking It Rich

By Yossi Katz

WHAT IF I TOLD you I know the secret to accumulating wealth? I'll bet you'd want to be my friend. Doesn't the prospect of gaining this elusive knowledge get you a tad bit excited? But what if I told you it's available to each of us? Impossible, you might say. But that would be your mistake.

God promised Abraham that his children would descend to Egypt as slaves, but would eventually be redeemed with great wealth. In fact, this week's *parashah* states, "They emptied out Egypt" (Exodus 12:36). Now, don't feel bad for the "poor" Egyptians. Essentially, prosperity was God's way of rewarding His loyal servant, Abraham. But if that was so, why not just straight out bless his children with wealth? Why was it necessary to reward Abraham by first enslaving his descendants?

The key to this riddle is that one cannot become rich unless he is poor first. King David, as the monarch, was obviously fabulously wealthy. Yet he would constantly proclaim, "For I am poor and destitute." Why? Because even the total *tzaddik*, the one who is completely righteous in his deeds, can never repay God for all the goodness in his life. Therefore the verse states, "Because regarding mankind, there is no righteous person in the world that does only good without sinning" (Ecclesiastics 7:20). King David understood that no matter how righteous he was, in comparing his actions to the great kindnesses God had bestowed upon him, he would always fall short. Therefore he saw himself as the poorest and most destitute. Whatever he had was not his; he was eating out of someone else's hand. Where's the pride in that?

What about us simple folk? We are certainly no King David. Should we not feel incredible humility before

God, as Job said, "In nakedness I left my mother's womb" (Job 1:21)? Our starting point is the realization of our humble beginnings. We are God's creation; our actions (or inactions) simply cannot begin to repay our awesome debt.

This understanding is truly the greatest blessing. Our Sages teach, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion" (*Pirkey Avot* 4:1). As we develop this attitude, we begin to appreciate everything that we have in our lives and begin to accumulate true wealth.

Someone who is not happy with his portion makes a few bucks and runs to spend his money on status symbols and the latest fads. No matter what he accumulates, his eye is already focused on the next big buy and he's never content with what he has. This can't be considered wealth, because his possessions aren't worth anything to him. But the humble fellow, even when he comes into great riches, never loses his appreciation for the simple things that benefited him until now. His possessions never depreciate; they only yield great profit.

Yes, God could simply have rewarded Abraham by blessing his children with great wealth. But would it have meant anything to them? Would they have appreciated it, or would it have caused them to lust after money and possessions, becoming enslaved to His very blessing? Instead God, in His great kindness, did the complete opposite. He brought about the temporary enslavement of our people, so we would be able to see things in true perspective. Rather than being drawn after money, we could rise above the temptation of the vanity of wealth and utilize this great blessing to benefit ourselves and others.

The secret to wealth is remembering that we are poor. As long as we remember our heavenly balance, we can adjust our bank accounts down here any which way we like.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Megillah 6:11

What Made Me a Breslover

By Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld

RABBI ZVI ARYEH ROSENFELD, ZT"l, was the great-great-grandson of Rabbi Aharon of Breslov, one of the two witnesses to Rebbe Nachman's famous pledge that he would save whoever came to his grave, recited the *Tikkun HaKlali*, and pledged a coin to charity. But while he was raised in a staunch Breslov home in the United States, the young Zvi Aryeh didn't feel the excitement of being a Breslover ... until one transformational experience.

Every Shabbat, my father would say a *shiur* in *Likutey Moharan* and try to impress upon me the fact that it's important being a Breslover. But it's difficult to inject *emunah* (faith) into a person, because everyone has freedom of belief. A person believes or doesn't believe according to his own whim. It's easier, of course, when you're brought up in a Breslov home and you go to yeshiva and learn.

Also, at that time, the type of learning then was different than it is today. I would safely say that an elementary student then knew more Gemara than a regular high school student at a yeshiva does now. But the interest in learning about Breslov did not reach a peak of excitement or feeling. It was matter of *mitzvas anashim milimada*, sort of lip service...

I got to a point where I felt that I wanted something more. I wanted to have a little more religion, a little more abstinence from pleasures, and this suddenly happened one night.

I began to think. The fact was that I was the son of one of the leading Breslovers in the world, and there must be something to it. Why not look into it a little more?

That night I selected the *sefer Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which deals with the topic of *hitbodedut*. It's a selection of statements about *hitbodedut*, praying to God in private, from different Breslov books. The introduction describes Rebbe Nachman's custom in this practice of *hitbodedut*, and how he became great through *hitbodedut*.

I began to read that very slowly, very carefully, and when I got to a certain very brief paragraph, something suddenly happened. It's difficult to describe. I felt somehow the gates of Heaven were opened.

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES. 12. Thought is a very elevated level. One who wishes to think only thoughts of holiness and ascend to the world of thought must be completely silent. Even saying something good and noble would spoil the thought. But even when a person is completely silent, there are still many distractions that confuse the mind. He still has to purify



his thoughts. The way to do this is through hearing and telling stories of the tzaddikim (*Likutey Moharan* I, 234).

13. Sexual fantasies are the prime source of all impurity. They are as strong a source of pollution as a dead body. Charity gives some protection against these fantasies, but one should never rely on this and permit himself to talk freely with women. He should say only

what is essential. The merit of the charity he gives will then save him from harm (*ibid.* I, 242).

14. There are certain fantasies that derive their strength from a particular "husk" which is extraordinarily tough. It is very difficult to escape from them. Even if you try to shut your eyes, the thought appears wherever you turn. Charity gives protection against these thoughts (*ibid.*).

15. Whenever you find bad thoughts and fantasies pressing in on your mind, don't be depressed. Try extra hard to turn aside from them. The effort itself is very precious and brings about a great *tikkun* (*ibid.* II, 5:7).



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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.