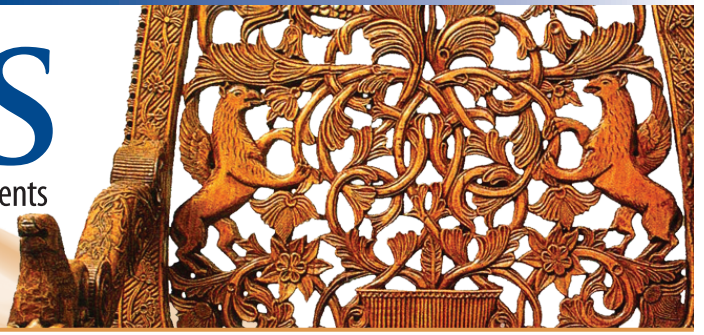


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Tzaddik at My Side

By Yossi Katz

JETHRO AND MOSES could not have been more different from one another.

There has never been a man as great as Moses. On three separate occasions, Moses ascended to Heaven for forty days and forty nights. He neither ate nor slept, and had no physical wants or needs to look after while he was there (Deuteronomy 9:9). Moses – a man of flesh and blood. Even the angels were jealous (*Shabbat* 88b). He was able to keep his physical form in Heaven because he had risen completely above its corporeality.

Jethro, on the other hand, was the priest of Midian, something akin to a pope. One of his names was Putiel, because he had fattened (*puti*) calves in preparation for idolatry (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas* 2). In this week's *parashah*, Jethro says, "Now I have known that God is greater than all the gods" (Exodus 18:11). But how did he know? Because "there was not an idol in the world that Jethro had overlooked, or chased after and worshipped" (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:1).

Yet even before Jethro had converted, the Torah states, "Moses went out to greet his father-in-law, bowing and kissing him. They asked one man to his friend about each other's welfare and went into the tent" (Exodus 18:7). "One man" certainly refers to Moses, who was the greatest of all men. It was specifically Moses who asked about Jethro's welfare. This is remarkable! Moses, the great tzaddik, the angelic man, lowered himself to someone who had been king of the idols, someone with such a dirty and unholy past.

This is the way of the true tzaddik. The tzaddik does not stand on a pedestal and allow only those who are "truly worthy," who have never done wrong, or who are of

impeccable pedigree to approach him. Instead, the true tzaddik brings himself right next to every person who has any degree of desire to come close to spirituality and Godliness. He descends right next to them as a true friend, encouraging them and providing the necessary advice for them to improve their ways and live a good life.

There was once a chassid who went to visit a prominent figure, hoping to gain a life-changing experience. Unfortunately, after the meeting, he was neither inspired nor changed. The chassid felt very bad about this and blamed himself. While recounting this episode to Reb Noson, the latter corrected him, saying, "Had the tzaddik been even a greater tzaddik, he could have had the power to encourage you, too."

Rebbe Nachman said, "*Gevalt!* Never give up hope! There is no such thing as despair." No matter where we're at or what we've done, the tzaddik is there for us. He wants to be our friend. He is concerned for our welfare. He will not turn us away. Our job is to open our hearts, learn his teachings and follow his advice. By listening to his words and living by his dictums, our lives will change for the better.

In Breslov we have been blessed with two short but powerful classics. One is *Meshivat Nefesh* (Restore My Soul), which includes many of the Rebbe's incredible teachings of encouragement. The other is *Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which teaches every Jew how to forge a relationship with God through his or her simple words. We have the tools! We can open our hearts to the wisdom contained in these short books and live life with the tzaddik standing together with us, holding our hand through every challenge and difficulty.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah

4-22

Every Minute Counts

By Chaim Kramer

AFTER REBBE NACHMAN passed away in 1810, Reb Noson devoted the rest of his life to publicizing and explaining the Rebbe's wisdom to new generations of followers. Gifted with a phenomenal memory, he compiled several biographical books detailing Rebbe Nachman's life experiences, conversations, and advice. He began expanding the corpus of Breslov literature with the writing of his own magnum opus (*Likutey Halakhot*), prayers based on the Rebbe's lessons (*Likutey Tefilot*), and the *Shemot HaTzaddikim* (Names of the Tzaddikim), and sent hundreds of letters to his children and followers explaining the Rebbe's teachings.

Not long before his passing, Reb Noson said, "The ShaKh was able to write as much as he did because he knew a Holy Name that caused his quill to move more quickly than a man could write. I did not have that Holy Name, but I was able to write as much as I did because I zealously guarded my time" (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh I*, 726).

Guarding his time was the key to Reb Noson's tremendous productivity. He did everything with the greatest speed. Undressing and dressing in the mikvah, he was quicker than anyone else. When he wrote, his pen seemed to fly across the page. Even when traveling, Reb Noson spent all his time in the coach immersed in prayer and Torah study.

Above all else, he remembered what others tend to forget: he never let the day of death pass from his mind. Always mindful of the *takhlis*, the ultimate goal, he took great care to watch his every moment, never wasting or killing time. He accepted all that came his way as a test in serving God, and never allowed anything to stand between himself and his devotions. Regardless of what happened to him, and no matter how much suffering and embarrassment he was subjected to, he remained steadfast in his desire to serve God as best he could.

About three weeks before Reb Noson passed away, his watch broke. Right away he sent it to his son, Reb Yitzchok, in Tulchin, asking him to make sure it was repaired and returned to him in Breslov immediately. In his letter to Reb Yitzchok, Reb Noson emphasized how much he needed his watch. Even as he was nearing his end, Reb Noson was still zealous about each and every second!

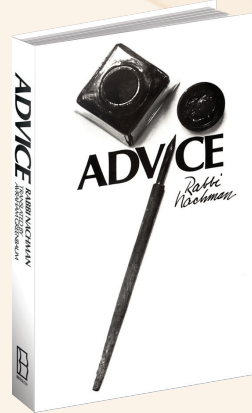
From "Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES. 19. Be very careful about what you think – a thought can literally take on a life of its own (*Likutey Moharan II*, 46).

20. Thought is man's highest aspect. It is more elevated than vision, the sense of hearing, or anything else. With thought it is possible to climb ever higher. This is why you must be so careful about what you think (*ibid.*).



21. Sometimes a thought – a good idea, or a glimmer of perception – can pass through your mind, shine there for a moment, and then fly away again. It takes great strength to run after the thought and chase it until you catch up with it (*ibid.* II, 58).

CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE.

1. Do not allow yourself to be disturbed by the various disputes between the tzaddikim (as for example the differences of opinion between the Sages of the Mishnah, the Talmud, and so on). If a person is troubled by these disputes and starts raising all kinds of questions about them, it is a sign that he has allowed some impurity into his mind. This internal impurity is the real source of his doubts. The danger is that his doubts could grow to the point that he becomes permanently separated from the tzaddikim and their followers, who are the source of true and enduring life (*ibid.* I, 5:4).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.