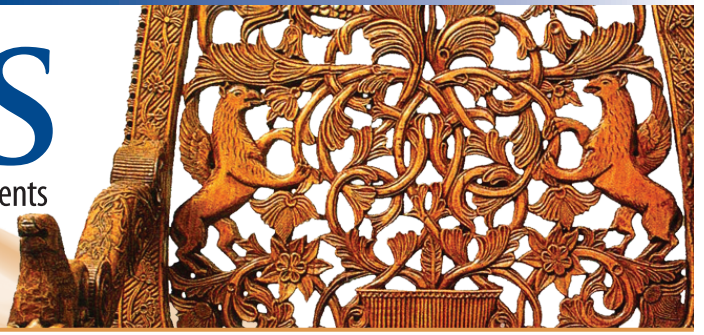


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Specialness of a Jew

By Yossi Katz

FOR THOUSANDS OF years, the Jews have irked the nations of the world by proclaiming ourselves the Chosen People. The idea of us being called by this extraordinary title stirs up their jealousy and challenges their self-worth. “Why are you so special?” they ask. “What makes you any better than us?” Interestingly, these questions are actually indicative of why they were not chosen in the first place.

Our nation traces its roots back to Abraham. At the age of three, Abraham began to reject the idol worship of those around him as he discovered the one true God. Despite an attempt on his life, Abraham set out to spread this awareness throughout the world. His tent was open on all sides, inviting all to enter and learn Torah. After seeing Abraham’s self-sacrifice and absolute pursuit of truth, God sealed an everlasting covenant with him.

One may think that at this point, Abraham had the right to feel good about himself. After all, wasn’t he chosen because he was so worthy? But the Torah tells us the exact opposite: Abraham declared, “I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). Rashi explains that Abraham was saying, “I was already fit to be dust at the hands of the kings (with whom he fought), and ashes at the hands of Nimrod (who threw him into the fiery furnace).” In other words, Abraham was looking at his Divine salvation and feeling that he was saved undeservedly—despite the fact that he had put himself in those situations for the sake of God Himself!

Fast forward to the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Standing at the foot of the mountain, the Jewish people make their own incredible declaration: “All that God has said, we will do and then we will understand”

(Exodus 24:7). Our Sages greatly praise the Jews for enthusiastically embracing God’s commandments even before knowing what they were (*Shabbat* 88a). But how could they accept something if they didn’t know what it was? On the other hand, the verse begins “All that God has said.” This seems to imply that God *did* state what was asked. If so, what great attitude did our Sages laud?

The answer is that the Jews indeed heard the words and knew what they were commanded to do, but they didn’t ask or analyze the meaning behind the commandments. Rather, they acted enthusiastically to fulfill God’s word. Why and how? Because they had inherited the attitude of Abraham. They knew they were not really worthy of God’s salvation, but that everything was an underserved gift from Heaven. Their attitude was: “We will do with absolute sincerity and happiness the commandments of God, and we will be blessed with whatever deep knowledge and insight God grants us.”

As Jews, that’s what makes us special and unique. Sometimes we are fortunate and feel a burst of spirituality, but we must never become self-absorbed and think that that was coming to us. Yes, it’s nice when we feel a deep and special spiritual insight, but that’s purely an underserved gift from Above. Instead, we must serve God with humbleness and faith, and feel an incredible happiness that we were chosen to fulfill this role. It is precisely this quality that God finds so special and wholesome in us – this is our *pintele yid*. This was the reason that God chose Abraham and revealed Himself to him. And this is the reason that God will choose each and every one of us, and bless us with our own unique Torah revelation.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nefilat Apayim 4:13

A Message in Code

By Gedaliah Fleer

ON MY TRIP to Uman in 1963, Reb Michel Dorfman gave me a small handwritten book penned by Reb Alter Tepliker. “This book is very dear to me,” Reb Michel said. “But if I remain in Russia, so few people will ever see it and in the end it will be lost. I am giving this book to you as a gift, since you will be able to take it out of the country.”

When I came to Israel and showed it to Reb Hirsch Leib Lippel, he told me that it really belonged to him. He said that after Reb Alter had transcribed the book, he left it with his son, and Reb Hirsch Leib had bought the book from him for 50 rubles. However, when Reb Hirsch Leib was ready to leave Russia, he was afraid to take the book with him, so he left it with Reb Avraham Sternhartz, who gave it to Reb Michel who had married his granddaughter.

“Reb Michel gave you this book so that it should reach me, because it is mine,” Reb Hirsch Leib insisted. “But if it is in your possession, it means that it was supposed to be in your possession. Just allow me to look at it.”

Every day R’ Hirsch Leib told me how much the book was reviving him. Since it was written in a cryptic style, I wondered how he had learned to decipher it. He told me that Reb Avraham had stayed up an entire night studying the book until he figured out its code. Then he explained to Reb Hirsch Leib the meaning of each and every word.

Sometime later, Reb Hirsch Leib agreed to show me, Reb Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld and Leibel Berger the meaning of the abbreviated words. Yet we were unable to understand the book’s deep and profound meaning.

I did understand one thing. Rebbe Nachman said that the Mashiach will redeem Israel with a “general redemption” and a “private redemption.” And before the redemption, the Mashiach will come to Rebbe Nachman’s *tziyun* (grave site) in Uman.

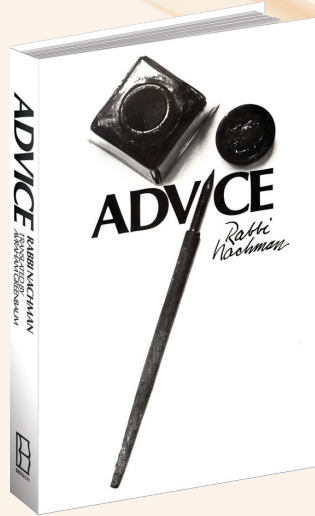
After I saw those words written in the manuscript that Reb Alter had copied directly from a manuscript written by Reb Noson, my desire to reach the *tziyun* for Rosh HaShanah grew even greater.

From “Against All Odds”

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE. 2. Always make every effort to search out whatever merit and goodness you can find within the Jewish people. Judge everyone on the scale of merit, even those who oppose you and treat you disrespectfully. If you do this you will never be troubled by opposition and arguments (*Likutey Moharan I, 6*).



3. If you find yourself in the middle of a dispute, it is very good if you can remain silent and pay no attention to the abuse that people throw at you. When you can hear what is said against you without answering back, this is true repentance. It is the remedy for all past sins (*ibid.*).

4. The various character traits are rooted in the four cosmic elements of fire, air, earth and water.

The tzaddik must be pure in all of them. He must be assured that nothing will make him trip up and sin. Only such a tzaddik and his followers can fight against the wicked. ... Only the perfect tzaddik can descend unharmed into the channel through which the wicked draw their strength in order to break them and humble them and cast them down to the earth (*ibid. I, 8:5*).



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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.