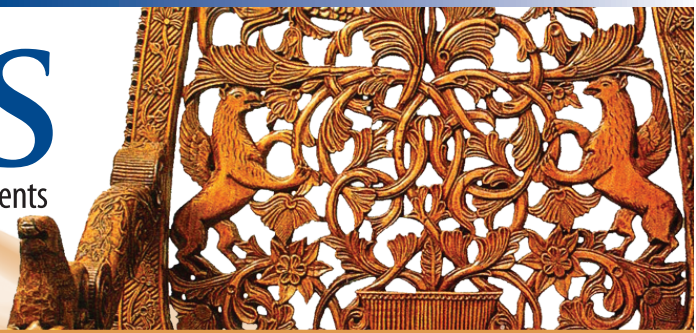


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Happy All Year Round

By Yossi Katz

**THE ANTICIPATION HAS** been growing for some time. The short, cold, dreary winter days, which reflect our deep spiritual slumber, are just about behind us. I recall traveling to Florida one January and being elated upon seeing some bugs and lizards crawling on the sidewalk. The vibrancy of life is so refreshing. Thankfully, the day Rebbe Nachman called “the beginning of all beginnings” – Purim – is about to begin.

What inhibits us from living a joyous life year-round? We all desire quality of life and set various goals to achieve it. But more often than not, we wind up struggling just to survive. As we are thrown various curveballs, we find that snoozing is just so much easier than remembering this great ideal that we deeply yearn for.

Just as the changing seasons give witness to the various cycles of birth and death in nature, so too, our existence here is only temporary. The thrills and pleasures of this world exist only for the moment; they cannot give us true or lasting meaning. However, the Torah and the *mitzvot* are our elixir, our tree of life. The Hebrew word *mitzvah* is related to the Aramaic word *tzavta* (connection). Through performing *mitzvot*, our soul connects to God, to eternity. We transcend the limitations of physical pleasure and connect to the true Source. There can be no greater joy and no greater vitality.

Our Sages ask: Where in the Torah is Haman, the villain of the Purim story, alluded to? In God’s words to Adam, “*HaMiN ha-eitz* – [Have you eaten] from the tree [of which I commanded you not to eat]?” (Genesis 3:11; *Chullin* 139b). On a deeper level, Haman represents the evil resulting from partaking of the fruit of the forbidden tree. Because Adam ate from the tree, he was cursed with

“In sadness you shall eat” (Genesis 3:17). When Adam was exiled from the Garden of Eden and its Tree of Life, tremendous sadness descended into the world. Similarly, when the Jewish People were exiled from God’s Presence, not only were they banished, but also the pure joy of the *mitzvot* and the subsequent connection to God fell into exile. The holy sparks of spiritual joy descended into the various vanities of our world.

The Hamans of this world misrepresent those sparks and mislead us into thinking that the “heres” and “nows” of temporal, worldly pleasures are our real joy. They sway us into thinking that the various quick-fixes being offered will make us happy, but ultimately, we remain completely disconnected from the True Source and we fail to redeem the sparks of joy. Consequently, we fall into meaningless routines and feel unfulfilled.

But once a year, we are blessed with the holiday of Purim. On this day, it is customary to act silly and goofy. Only through silliness can we descend into the seemingly dearest parts of our lives and rescue those precious sparks of joy. If we act a little crazy, while affirming our great faith in and connection with God and Torah, we become empowered to face depression and transform it to the greatest joy. Don’t be afraid. This Purim is the time to let loose and experience how liberating true joy can be!

Purim is the start. It’s the day that teaches us how to hone this great skill. And after Purim, Rebbe Nachman says, this skill is absolutely necessary for day-to-day living. Only by acting a little silly can we transcend the confounding barriers of sadness that Haman has erected and reach the redemptive state of happiness and joy every day of the year.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nefilat Apayim 4*

# Dance of a Lifetime

By Yehudis Golshevsky

IN TEPLIK THERE lived a man named Feivel who was a sincere servant of God. Without fail, he would get up every night at midnight to recite the Tikkun Chatzot (Midnight Lament) and mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple. The sad state of the world and the all discord and dismay that fill it are a direct consequence of the loss of the Temple and the deep connection with God that once gave it vitality.

After reciting Tikkun Chatzot, Feivel would feel so happy that he would immediately begin to dance with joy. He would sing with great passion, “*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu!* How fortunate are we, how pleasant our lot!”

People thought he was strange for rejoicing so much in doing *mitzvot* and because he took such delight in the simple fact of his Jewishness. As a mark of their derision, they started to call him “Feivel Ashreinu.”

When Reb Noson would visit Teplik, Feivel always greeted him joyously. One time, however, Feivel failed to meet Reb Noson when he arrived. When Reb Noson asked the locals, “Where is Feivel?” the townspeople wondered which Feivel he meant. When he made clear who he meant, they said in a dismissive tone, “Oh, him? Since you were here last, ‘Feivel Ashreinu’ passed away.”

Taking note of their disrespectful attitude, Reb Noson spoke to them sharply. “One of the punishments of the Next World, the experience that is called *Olam HaTohu*, is that a person is forced to repeat the acts that he did in this world for a seemingly endless time.

Generally, this is very humiliating, because after a person is no longer blinded by his this-worldly self-interest, the repetition brings home just how exceedingly foolish those actions really were. Most of us spend almost all of our time without having a sense of how privileged we are to be part of the Jewish people and be able to perform *mitzvot*.

“So why should you denigrate Reb Feivel? Do you really think that he will be ashamed in the Next World when he is dancing ecstatically and singing, ‘*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu!*?’”

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:786*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE.** 9. One way to develop genuine faith is to offer hospitality to true Torah scholars. When you have true faith it will give you the strength to be untouched by the abuse and ridicule of others (*Likutey Moharan I, 2:3*).

10. There are people who do not have a good word for anyone. They always look on the bad side of people. The source of their life-force is in the forces of the Other Side, which is called “the end of all flesh” (Genesis 6:13). Such people are constantly trying to make an end of things. They are highly destructive. Their accusations and slander arouse harsh judgments in the world. The fundamental evil here is the abuse of the faculty of speech. The way to crush and humble these people is by developing the faculty of speech to perfection (*ibid. I, 38:2*).

11. Clapping your hands when you pray helps against strife and divisiveness. Murder and destruction are driven from the world, and peace reigns (*ibid. I, 44*).

12. The deeper a person’s understanding, the more detached he will be from infighting and controversy. The main reason for factionalism and anger is lack of understanding. Torah is the source of all understanding. Therefore the study of Torah brings peace to the world and causes factionalism to disappear (*ibid. I, 56:3, 6*).

13. Immersing in a mikvah deepens understanding. Therefore it is also a help against factionalism (*ibid. I, 56:7*).



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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.*