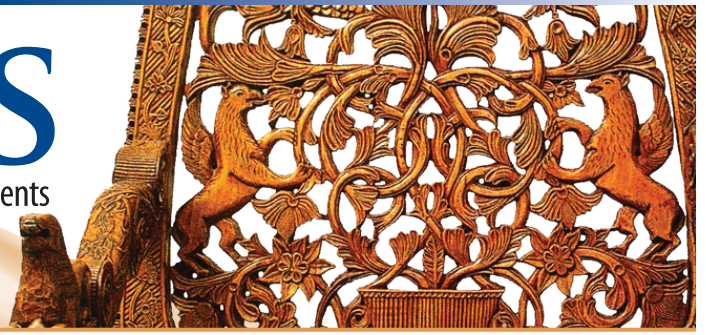


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Matter of Survival

By Yossi Katz

DESERT ISLANDS ARE a popular backdrop for jokes. Once a Jew was discovered on a desert island. The fellow who finds the Jew surviving on tropical fruit and living in a bamboo hut notices that he has also built two other huts. “Those are synagogues,” the Jew explains.

“But why do you need two of them?” the fellow wonders.

The Jew answers, “This one is the synagogue I pray in, and that one is the synagogue I *don't* pray in!”

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People often don't appreciate the cardinal importance of finding the ultimate spiritual master. They assume that anyone who knows a fair amount more than they do will suffice. “If I am a humble layman,” they rationalize, “shouldn't a simple rabbi be enough?”

This couldn't be further from the truth. Rebbe Nachman observes that the sicker a patient is, the greater a doctor he needs. If someone suffering from a potentially terminal illness chooses to be treated by his family doctor, is he not considered insane? The GP might even do more harm than good, and be considered extremely negligent!

If this is true of our physical, finite life, how much more true is it of our eternal, spiritual health and our ultimate *tikkun*? For that, you need a doctor of the spirit, a Tzaddik.

But here's where it gets complicated. You set out to discover the Tzaddik who can guide you, only to encounter conflicting opinions and arguments about the various Tzaddikim out there. You may conclude, “You can't believe in anyone. After all, I understand and agree with the arguments of this side, and I also understand and agree with the arguments of the other

side. So I will agree with both of them, and not believe in anyone!” Especially today, due to the proliferation of online media, this pessimistic attitude has become very dominant.

However, the true answer to this problem is alluded to in the words of our *parashah*: “The seventh day will be holy for you; it is a Shabbat of complete rest to God” (Exodus 35:2).

Shabbat is like a desert island. It's a day when we disconnect from the illusion that we are the ones in charge and recognize God's kingship and the true spiritual reality of our existence. And the Tzaddik is the one who teaches us how to manage our everyday involvement with this physical world and transform every action into something spiritual. Therefore the Tzaddik and Shabbat are interlinked.

Our Sages present the scenario of someone traveling in a desert who loses track of the days of the week. How should he observe Shabbat when he's not sure when it is? Our Sages teach that he should treat every day as if it may be Shabbat, and limit the *melakhah* (creative work) he does to actions that are needed for survival. He should also count six days from the time he lost track of the days, and observe Shabbat on the seventh day, making Kiddush and Havdalah and refraining from *melakhah* (*Shabbat* 69b).

This teaching can also be applied to the Tzaddik. If we're not sure who the true Tzaddik is, we should believe in all Tzaddikim! And as much as possible, we should limit our involvement with material concerns to “matters of survival” only. However, we must also “make Kiddush and Havdalah” – we must also proclaim the seventh day holy and separate. Each person should designate one Tzaddik as being holy and special to him, and follow his teachings and guidance to attain his personal *tikkun*.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shabbat 4:13

Reason to Rejoice

REB BEIRACH RUBINSON lived every moment of his life before, during and after the Holocaust according to Breslov teachings. He would say, “A person’s life is characterized by ups and downs, hills and valleys. There are days that symbolize good times, and nights that symbolize difficulty and darkness. One must know that even when things are going smoothly, they won’t remain this way forever. And when things are going badly, this too won’t last forever. We must have faith that even after the greatest valley of death, there will be light.”

Reb Beirach had an acquaintance named Reb Mendel Morris who also had experienced great suffering, losing his first wife and enduring other tragedies. Since Reb Beirach had a tremendous talent for making people happy, especially through the *grammen* (humorous songs) that he composed and sang at weddings and other special occasions, Reb Mendel invited him to a *sheva berakhot* for one of his children to bring the newlyweds joy.

At that *sheva berakhot*, Reb Beirach seemed to have an extra dose of joy. He was smiling and shining, and was clearly in an especially joyous frame of mind, even more so than usual.

“Reb Beirach,” Reb Mendel asked him, “Why are you so happy?”

Reb Beirach shrugged and continued his happy banter. But after much prodding, he grew serious.

“Do you know what today is?” he asked Reb Mendel. “Today is the anniversary of the *brit* of my fourth son, the youngest of my sons who was killed by the Nazis. Before I came here, I started thinking about him and began to calculate how old he would be today had he lived. I started reminiscing about the time we spent together. I loved that child! He was brilliant and good-natured. And I felt myself falling into depression...”

“Right then and there, I decided I would not let the evil inclination win this battle! I remembered how fortunate I was to have had the mitzvah of giving my son a *brit* and bringing him into the covenant of Abraham. And I decided I would overcome those feelings of sadness and go to make people happy at Reb Mendel’s *sheva berakhot*. Now I too can draw from the wellsprings of joy and be even happier than ever!”

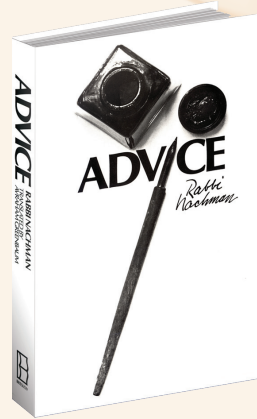
SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE. 17. Another reason for the opposition against tzaddikim is that they do not have sufficient faith in themselves. They lack adequate faith in the value of the original Torah concepts they have developed, or do not fully believe that God has great joy from their teachings. They have insufficient confidence in their own originality, and as a result their powers grow weaker. This is the reason opposition is sent to them – to encourage them to repent for their weak faith (*Likutey Moharan I, 61:5*).

18. At the deepest level, the fact that there are disputes between the various tzaddikim (for example, the arguments between the sages of the Mishnah and the Gemara) has its root in the concept of the Empty Void, the mystical concept of the void that was

left after the primordial light was contracted. Any real understanding of this concept is beyond the capacity of our human intelligence. Because of this it is wrong for a person to allow himself to be troubled by fundamental doubts through an inability to understand how it could be that there were disagreements between the sages on matters of Torah. One must simply have faith that “these and these are the words of the Living God,” even if we are unable to understand how this can be. We must strengthen ourselves with faith alone (*ibid. I, 64:4*).



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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.