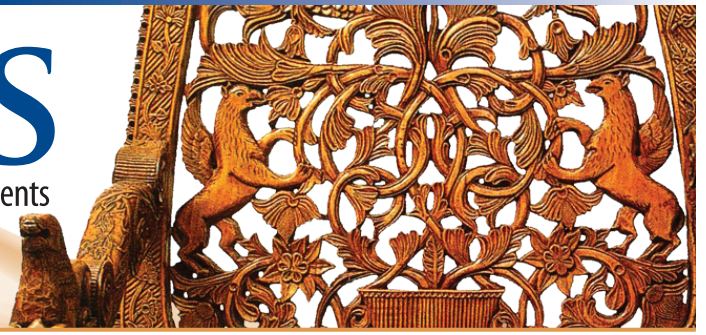


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Let Pesach Set You Free

By Yossi Katz

OF ALL THE Jewish holidays, Pesach resonates especially well in America and other democratic societies. These societies can identify with the Jewish people in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by a dominant race, who overcame their persecutors to live as a free nation. Former President Obama himself expressed this sentiment a few years ago during his weekly address at Passover time: “In America, the Passover story has always had special meaning. We come from different places and diverse backgrounds, but we are bound together by a journey from bondage to liberty, enshrined in our founding documents and continued in each generation.”

This Shabbat, Shabbat HaGadol, it is customary to read through most of the Haggadah. This is done because the miracle of redemption had already begun at this time in Egypt. Additionally, this reading gets us ready for Seder night. Although we will stop short of reading this part of the Haggadah this Shabbat, our Sages summed up the purpose of the Seder by quoting the passage “In each generation, each person is obligated to see himself as though he personally went out of Egypt.”

Pesach is more than a historical remembrance – it’s a reenactment. The proper observance of Pesach isn’t just a matter of reading certain words and doing certain things, but of tasting and experiencing personal freedom. The observance of Pesach and its customs should serve as a catalyst that spiritually elevates us above the physical limitations of this world and all its worries, anxieties and issues.

And yet, so many kvetch about all the cleaning and shopping and prep work it takes to get ready for Pesach and the Seder. Isn’t this process supposed to be liberating? Where are we going wrong?

Reb Noson writes:

“Rebbe Nachman cautions us not to be overly stringent in any observance. The Rebbe quotes the Talmudic maxims “God does not rule over His creatures with tyranny” (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), and “The Torah was not given to the ministering angels” (*Berakhot* 25b) ...

“Rebbe Nachman was also very much against all the special stringencies that are observed on Pesach. Many people go so far in observing many fine points of custom that they are literally depressed by the holiday. He spoke about this at length. One of his followers once asked the Rebbe exactly how to act with regard to an ultra-stringent observance. The Rebbe made a joke of it.

“The Rebbe spoke about this quite often. He said that these ultra-strict practices are nothing more than confused foolishness. He told us that he had also been caught up in this and would waste much time thinking up all sorts of unnecessary restrictions ... He said, ‘True devotion consists mainly of simplicity and sincerity. Pray much, study much Torah, do many good deeds. Do not worry yourself with unnecessary restrictions.’ ... He concluded, ‘There is nothing that you absolutely must do and if not ... If you can, fine, but if not, ‘God exempts a person under duress’ (*Bava Kama* 28b).”

Our problem is that we tend to get caught up in the minutia of Pesach. When it’s finally time to begin thinking about why we are doing all of this effort in the first place, we are so emotionally and physically zapped that we can’t be bothered. To paraphrase Reb Noson, “People ask, ‘How am I going to make Pesach?’ One way or another, Pesach will be. But what is going to be with Pesach itself? What is going to be with the essence of Pesach?”

Rebbe Nachman gives us profound and simple advice. It’s not up to us to worry about stringencies and extras. Our job is to keep the basic laws without getting stressed. A competent Rabbi is able to help with this. However, our focus should be on appreciating the holiday and its deeper meaning. Then our observance will bring us to the feeling of personal freedom that Pesach demands of us. Amen!

Based on Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom #235

Reb Noson's Pesach Cleaning

By Chaim Kramer

IN 1834, a ruthless and unrelenting campaign was begun against Reb Noson to prevent him from spreading Rebbe Nachman's teachings. His opponents slandered him to the government and he had to flee Breslov.

When he was allowed to return, his opponents tried a different tactic. An army unit was stationed in Breslov and the authorities sought a large room in which to make and repair soldiers' boots. His opponents let the authorities know that Reb Noson had several large rooms, and with the aid of a "small gift," the boot factory was installed in Reb Noson's house – complete with piles of hides and a team of non-Jewish workers who worked and ate their meals there every day, including Shabbos.

The night before Pesach, when the time came to search for *chametz*, the non-Jews were still at work. Reb Noson recited the blessing with his usual intensity, having in mind this time that just as the *chametz* must be removed, so should the boot factory. Then he went around with his candle searching for *chametz*.

The workers were so awed by Reb Noson's blessing that they told him to search wherever he wanted and not think of them at all. By then, the few Breslovers with influence in the town had been able to convince the authorities to relocate the boot factory. The following day, Erev Pesach, at noon, the factory was removed. Immediately a few people were hired to help Reb Noson clean the house and get it ready for Pesach.

That night during the Seder, Reb Noson recited the Haggadah with great fervor. During the meal, his family started talking about their sufferings and how happy they were to be rid of the boot factory. Then they spoke against their opponents.

This upset Reb Noson. He said, "This is such a great and awesome time. After all the effort every Jew has put into his Pesach preparations, after all the money we have spent to honor Pesach, after all our longing to perform the mitzvot of Pesach, it is absolutely forbidden to talk against them. They are our brothers. Eventually they will be rectified. We ourselves will have to seek remedies for them!"

After the meal, Reb Noson completed the Seder with a deeply inspiring melody.

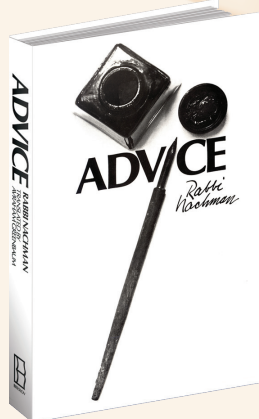
From "Through Fire and Water"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE. 23. Factionalism can cause even truly religious people to start having doubts and questions about their faith (*Likutey Moharan I*, 251).

24. A person who is involved in a controversy can be thrown down from his level. He has to be very determined and plead with God not to let him stray from his path because of this (*ibid. I*, 258).



25. When a person is involved in a dispute he should never get up and say that whatever his opponent does to him he will do to his opponent in return. This will only help his opponent achieve what he wants, which is to see his victim suffer. The best thing is to judge his enemies on the scale of merit, and even to do them favors where he can. In the end their evil intentions will all come back on their own heads (*ibid. I*, 277).

26. This applies when one's opponents are not good people. But when they are tzaddikim there is no doubt that their only intention is to benefit him. Their very opposition has the power to raise him up and sweeten any harsh decrees that may have been made against him. This is why they oppose him in the first place. A person must understand that when he is confronted with opposition from tzaddikim it is only for his benefit (*ibid.*).



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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.