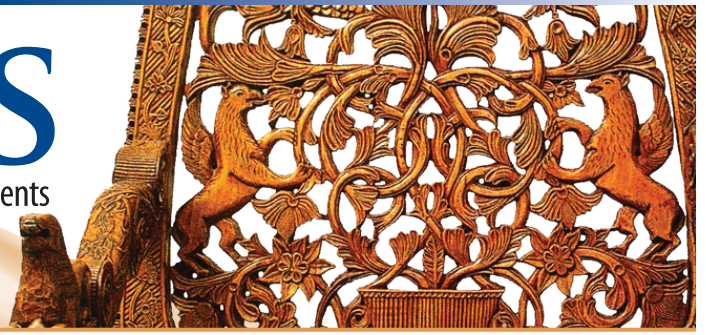


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Higher Calling

By Yossi Katz

“**THE THINGS THAT** make me different are the things that make me” – A. A. Milne

Individuality is one of life’s most prized virtues. Imagine how boring everything would be if everyone were the same. A world of clones would not even be worth living in; after all, what would distinguish us from others while leaving room for our own existence? Variety creates the conditions for us to appreciate the gift of life.

This concept is true of the entire creation. Whereas before Creation, everything was one, God made room for each of us to come into existence. This can be compared to two sides. The right side is straight – it represents God’s Oneness, and there is no room for anything else but Him. The left side is diverse and creative. There are many choices and distinctions, but there is also the potential for lies and fabrications.

As beautiful as our individuality is, the left side by its very nature gives way to freedom of choice and the possibility of being completely blinded from the Source of life. We are surrounded by a society in which falsehood is ever so prominent and the choices are easily accessible and endless. How can we stay focused? How can we gain access to the right side, the Source of life itself, the One and Only God?

Our existence in this world can be compared to the life of a slave. We are born into an imperfect and impoverished, limited state. But we want to experience something endlessly higher and more meaningful. The Torah therefore commands the slave to be circumcised.

Man was created in the image of God. His body represents a perfect figure, but he is born with one extra part, the foreskin that must be removed by way of circumcision.

The foreskin serves no purpose other than representing this world’s potential for multiplicity and, subsequently, falsehood. Therefore, it must be removed. By doing so, the slave reaches a higher calling and becomes connected to God’s Oneness. For this reason, Jewish law dictates that the slave must refrain from violating the Torah’s negative commandments.

Just as we circumcise the extraneous foreskin, Rebbe Nachman teaches that when we speak words of truth, we also become elevated and are able to restore and reconnect this world of multiplicity to its origin of Oneness. The veil of falsehood is removed from our eyes, and we can finally experience the Essence of Creation.

Yet the Torah forbids freeing the newly-elevated slave. “You shall hold on to them as an inheritance for your children after you, as acquired property, and they shall serve you forever” (Leviticus 25:46). Why? Now that he has been elevated from his base slave state, shouldn’t he be allowed to live a life of freedom, a life of spiritual ecstasy? Why must he remain enslaved?

God created this world in its current state, and wishes it to remain this way. It is our job to rise up, to elevate our lives and reconnect with God’s Oneness. In order for this to happen, while at the same time maintaining the world’s existence, we must all experience constant states of highs and lows. This is our Master’s wish and desire. In His great kindness, He knows it is not desirable for us to be completely free. However, by knowing that this is for our ultimate benefit, we can gain the patience and resolve to weather the ups and downs and serve our Master and Father with dedication and love. We can know what this world is all about, and realize that we are not really slaves at all.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Avadim 2

Shabbat Afternoon High

By Ozer Bergman

SHABBAT AFTERNOON IS the climax of the holy day, the time we can achieve true closeness with God. The *zemirot* (table songs) that we sing at the Third Shabbat Meal reflect our desire and longing to consummate that relationship: *Mizmor LeDavid* (God is my Shepherd) and *Yedid Nefesh* (Soul's Beloved). After disengaging from weekday grind on Friday night, enjoying delicious meals and a refreshing sleep, Shabbat afternoon finds us in full "Shabbat mode," open to experience the true meaning of the day.

* *

Three tzaddikim passed away on Shabbat afternoon: Moses our teacher, who received the Torah on our behalf; King David, author of Psalms, who personifies prayer; and Joseph, the only one titled "Tzaddik." The tzaddik, by virtue of his morality and generosity, connects the brain and the heart, Torah and prayer.

Shabbat afternoon is an *et ratzon*, a time of extra Divine favor. It is a time when all that we know (Torah/Moses) and all that we feel (prayer/David) is meant to be awash with the desire to meld into giving to Creation, receiving from the Creator, and giving to His creation (the function of the tzaddik/Joseph). It is a time to rise and realize what Creation can be before stepping back down into your body, ready to live that promise. It is the time God commits to creating the universe for another week.

* *

Shabbat is an ideal time for *hitbodedut*. Rebbe Nachman prescribes this practice of private prayer to God every day, but Shabbat lends a special cast to the experience. Shabbat and holidays were made expressly to give us a "day of rest," a day when making and taking the time to settle our minds would be easier. The extra sanctity of these days adds something to *hitbodedut*, even if you can't always taste it.

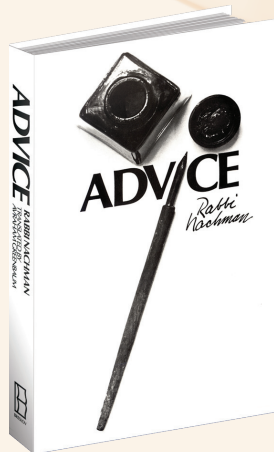
The ultimate goal of *hitbodedut* is *bitul* (self-nullification to God). One setting that is conducive to entering a state of *bitul* is Shabbat. The quiet of Shabbat, provided by refraining from the forbidden activities and ceasing to think of weekday concerns, together with the additional prayers that focus on the greatness of God's work, produces a great calm and *yishuv hadaat* (settled mind). And Shabbat comes every week.

Based on "Where Earth and Heaven Kiss"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

BARRIERS. 3. It may well be true that the desire and yearning to achieve something holy are good in themselves, and that even if the barriers prevent him from accomplishing the holy deed in actual fact, it will still be accounted to him as if he had achieved it because his intention was good. The Sages did indeed say, "If a person intended to do a mitzvah but was



prevented from doing it, it is accounted to him as if he had done it" (*Berakhot* 6a). ...

But it is different for someone who does not merely want to feel he has done his duty, but actually wants the mitzvah or the holy deed itself. What good is it for him to know that as a special concession it will be accounted to him "as if" he had achieved it because he had the desire to succeed?

This "as if" will not give him any satisfaction at all. ... For a Jew, the true goal is to accomplish what he wants and desires in actual fact – to transform the thought in the mind into a practical reality. When a person has true desire, he can certainly achieve this and break every barrier or obstacle that stands in his way. The only reason they were sent to him was to heighten his yearning. When the desire matches the preciousness of the goal, he can achieve every holy deed that he yearns for (*Likutey Moharan* I, 66:4).



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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.

Dedicated for the speedy and complete recovery of Reb Chaim Menachem ben Leah