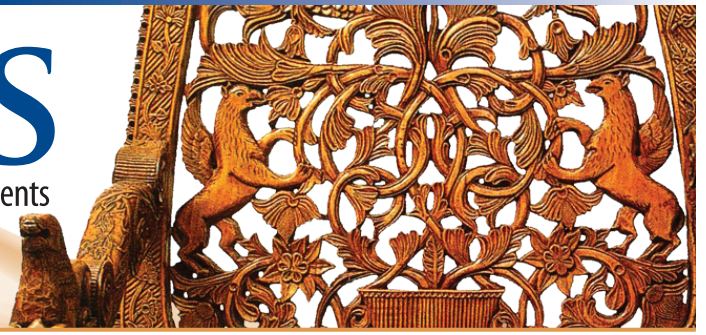


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Soldier On!

By Yossi Katz

REB NOSON ONCE traveled to be with Rebbe Nachman, but because of the opposition of his family at that time, the Rebbe told him, “To you we must say, ‘*Shalom aleikhem! Tzeis’khem I’shalom!*’ (Hello and goodbye) to keep the opposition to a minimum.”

The Rebbe then taught Reb Noson a lesson, and Reb Noson was forced to take leave of his beloved Rebbe and mentor.

This is the story of our lives.

At times we feel tremendous yearning for and closeness to God. We are able to study much and pray with great concentration and emotion. But more often than not, we slide back into our usual routine and feel distant from God. We pray, but our mind is traveling elsewhere; we have little time or peace of mind for genuine Torah study and spiritual pursuits.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that in order to gain the ability to always return to God, one must be an expert in both “running” and “returning” (*Likutey Moharan* I, 6:4).

Being an expert in “running” means that when you’ve had a great spiritual lift, you must realize that God is great and that you have certainly not yet arrived at the ultimate level of spirituality—so you will spur yourself to keep on striving for even higher levels. Being an expert in “returning” means that when you feel distant and disconnected, you must remember that God is everywhere, even in the lowest of places—and reach out to and connect to God even there.

This week’s *parashah* counts the Jews, for what it refers to as “going out to the army” (Numbers 1:3). “Going

out to the army” means that we are each soldiers in the army of God. Our mission is to attempt to connect to Him everywhere—at our jobs, in our relationships with friends and family, and in our study halls and shuls. But many times, things just don’t go right. So the Torah encourages us, “Be a soldier!” Learn to “go out” of your preconceptions for spiritual growth and elevate every aspect of life.

What stops us from doing something that seems so obvious and vital?

The Torah tells us, “And the Jewish people should encamp, each person according to his camp, and each person according to his flag” (ibid. 1:52). Later, the Torah praises the Jews for doing this: “Thus did they encamp according to their flags, and thus did they travel” (ibid. 2: 34).

What does this mean for us?

When Moses ascended Mount Sinai, God warned the rest of the Jews not to attempt to climb the mountain. The border was defined; the Jewish people were commanded to stay put. In our daily lives, as we experience moments of distance from God and moments of elevation, we need to “camp” and live according to our own circumstances.

Our unique lives and experiences are tailor-made from God to pave the road to achieving the ultimate relationship with our Creator. If we are careful not to overstep our boundaries by comparing ourselves with other people’s lives or with “visions” of what our lives should look like, we, too, will merit joining the army of God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaPeirot 5

Free of Sin

By Yehudis Golshevsky

FROM THE VERY beginning, Reb Shimon – Rebbe Nachman’s *shamash* and first follower – put into practice every word of guidance that he heard from the Rebbe. After years of intense Divine service, Rebbe Nachman said of him, “Shimon is just like his name. *ShiMON* can be rearranged as *MaSh AVoN* (free of sin).” Reb Noson said in later years that Rebbe Nachman attested that Reb Shimon had conquered all of his negative character traits – entirely through prayer and *hitbodedut*.

Even though Reb Shimon ran a business, he never allowed his work to get in the way of his Divine service. He spent a great deal of time out in the field in prayer, mainly at night, despite the summer heat or deep winter freezes. Because he treasured his hours of *hitbodedut* in the forests and fields, Reb Shimon established his home on the edge of the town, far from others. There that he devoted himself – privately, quietly – to his service of God.

Reb Shimon continued this lifestyle even after he moved to the Land of Israel near the end of his life. In the holy city of Tzefat, he again set up his residence at the very edge of town where it met the open fields; this was where the ARI and his students used to learn and pray hundreds of years earlier.

Once, when Reb Noson and Reb Shimon spoke words of Torah while traveling together, Reb Noson noticed that Reb Shimon was carrying a manuscript of *chiddushim* (original Torah insights). He managed to get it out of Reb Shimon’s hands and, after looking at it closely, he realized it was Reb Shimon’s own work.

“Why, these are wonderful ideas! You must publish them!” exclaimed Reb Noson. Reb Shimon only sat quietly and took back the papers as soon as he could.

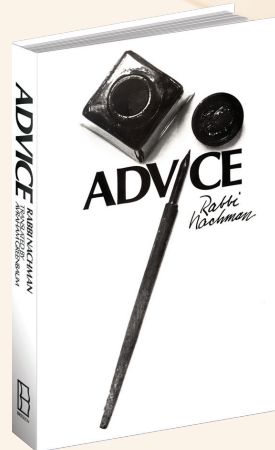
When they stopped at an inn, Reb Shimon took the first opportunity to approach the pot-bellied stove in the common room and throw in his own manuscript! He was willing to sacrifice years of hard work just to be sure that he never derived any personal benefit or honor from his Torah study.

Based on Or HaOrot I, p. 126

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

BARRIERS. 4. There are people who, after a whole life time of materialism, suddenly feel a strong desire to walk in the paths of God. The attribute of judgment then rises up to accuse them. It tries to prevent them from following the way of God by creating barriers. The unintelligent person, when he sees these barriers, starts to retreat. But someone with understanding takes this



as the very signal that he should draw closer. He understands that God is to be found in the barrier itself – and the truth is that God Himself is indeed hidden in this barrier (*Likutey Moharan I*, 115).

5. It may take a lot of effort for a person to break the barriers confronting him when he starts to draw closer to God. Many people experience opposition from their parents or parents-in-law, their wives, and so on. But all of one’s effort produces a vessel. Within this vessel he can receive the holiness and purity that he will attain thereafter. The greater the struggle a person has at the outset, the greater the vessel he forms. In the end, he will be worthy of true fear of God, and he will receive abundant blessings and goodness. He will be worthy of giving perfection to the Holy Name of God, because the essence of its perfection is founded on religious awe (*ibid. I*, 185).



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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.