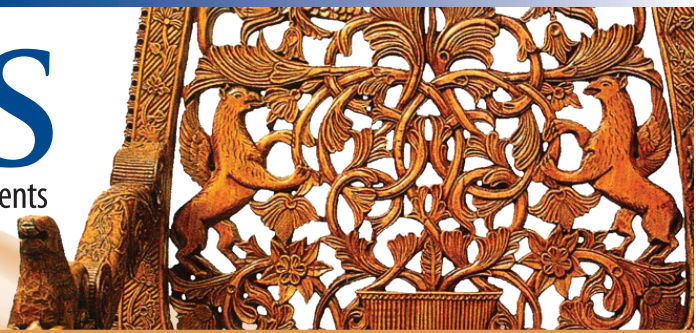


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Best Kind of Criticism

By Yossi Katz

HAVE YOU RECENTLY been criticized or rebuked? Did you find those words to be helpful? Did they initiate any positive change in your behavior?

For most people, criticism makes them feel hurt and put down. And when we rebuke others, we often don't see any change and, even more likely, a spiteful reaction.

Although there is a great mitzvah to rebuke (see Leviticus 19:17), most people are not capable of fulfilling this mitzvah properly. Even Rabbi Akiva, who lived in a generation of tremendous Torah scholarship, said, "I would be astounded if there is anyone capable of rebuking in this generation" (*Erkin* 16b). In this week's *parashah*, Moses delivers words of rebuke to the Jewish people in the subtlest of ways, by naming the places where they sinned but not the sins themselves (see Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:1). We see from this the tremendous sensitivity required before reproaching another Jew.

Rebbe Nachman explains why it's so important to know how to rebuke properly. He teaches that our souls receive their sustenance from "scent," as we find regarding Adam, "and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life" (Genesis 2:7; *Likutey Moharan* II, 8).

Imagine that something foul-smelling is lying around. As long as it lies undisturbed, its odor is minimal. But if the item is picked up and carried about, its smell grows far worse. The same is true of ourselves. Our shortcomings omit "foul odors," but as long as these imperfections are left at bay, their bad influence has a minimal effect on our souls. However, if they're stirred up through

incorrect criticism, these shortcomings begin to release a terrible odor which, in effect, cuts off our souls from their spiritual lifeline. Imagine how much damage can be done!

The professors in the area of rebuke are our great tzaddikim. They are the only ones capable of looking into our souls and extracting our essential pure and pleasant fragrance. Rather than causing spiritual disconnect, they plug us back into the Source. Rebbe Nachman teaches us the way to emulate their work and properly fulfill the Torah's commandment.

When we look at ourselves and others, we usually notice shortcomings and imperfections. While these observations may be true, our highlighting them only exacerbates those issues. If, instead, we look beyond them toward the inherent goodness that we and others possess, we are able to "release" the soul's pure and pleasant fragrance. True, the bad is still there, but it's only external. True rebuke extracts the soul's true goodness, letting the foul-smelling parts fall away automatically.

This is why Moses mentioned only the names of the various encampments and not the sins that were done there. At each juncture, the Jewish people faced enormously difficult challenges. The same way that the desert is a place of extreme danger to the body, it is also a spiritual wasteland to the soul. We fell short not because we were evil and rebellious, but because of the negative spiritual environment. It took someone of Moses' caliber to recognize this and reconnect us to God by reminding us of our true nature.

Only the way of the tzaddikim can lead us from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Holy Land. May we all follow their lead by revealing the true greatness of each and every Jew. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tzitzit 5:7; ibid. Orlah 4:17

Waiting for Change

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN TAUGHT his followers that they shouldn't offer rebuke or criticism, no matter how well-intentioned, unless it was clear that it would really help. Often, a mistimed or poorly-executed attempt to get another person back on the straight and narrow causes far more harm than good. Knowing when to leave a person space to develop at his own pace can sometimes be the greatest means of drawing him closer to God.

In Uman there was a man known as Aharon the Butcher, who rented the local bakery. For a time, this man would attend the Breslov synagogue in Uman, but his decorum there left something to be desired. He often conversed loudly during the services, disturbing everyone around him.

Naturally, many of the chassidim objected; they figured that the man would only change if he was thrown out of the shul as a warning, and be allowed to return only if he changed his ways. When they asked Reb Avraham b'Rav Nachman, one of the Breslov leaders at that time, what he thought of their plan, he voiced clear opposition.

"Listen, you can see yourselves that he is not, strictly speaking, a Breslover," he said. "Why, then, does he bother coming to pray with us? What draws him? Since he chooses to pray with us, it's clear that our responsibility is to welcome him so that he can absorb the unique atmosphere of our *tefillah* (prayer). Clearly, he comes here because he senses the joy and focus that infuse our prayers. If we are patient with him, we can hope that he will eventually improve greatly."

Aharon the Butcher eventually moved to America. Although in those years most Jews who immigrated fell away from Judaism, this man did not. His daughter wrote letters to their family in Uman saying how proud she was of her father's growing *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) despite – or perhaps because of – the new challenges.

"Father even railed in the synagogue about their inattention to the prayers," she reported. "He said, 'You call this a proper prayer? I'll have you know that I used to pray with the Breslovers in Uman. *They* know what *tefillah* is!'"

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VII, 182

SIDEPATH

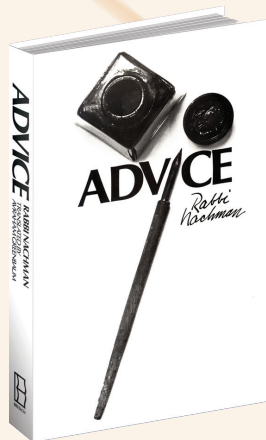
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SHABBAT. 15. Eating on Shabbat is the main way to honor Shabbat. Shabbat eating is very precious: it has a unique holiness. We partake of Godliness itself. It is good to have ample food to eat on Shabbat. This in itself can make up for having desecrated Shabbat in the past (*Likutey Moharan* I, 125; *ibid.* I, 277).

16. The good deeds and mitzvot that we perform during the six weekdays lack the power to rise up and go before God until the coming of Shabbat. Then they all ascend and come before God, and He has great delight

from them – even from the mitzvot of ordinary people, which may be lacking the proper degree of care and concentration with which the Divine commandments should be carried out. As all these good deeds and mitzvot ascend, the path to God is opened wide. Our eating on Shabbat actually brings about this ascent (*ibid.*).

17. The holiness and joy of Shabbat can also be drawn into the six weekdays. This comes about through the praise and thanks we give to God, and also when we devote ourselves to the study of Torah law. ... Then we can have joy in God and perform all the mitzvot in joy even on the six weekdays (*ibid.* II, 2:5-6).



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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.