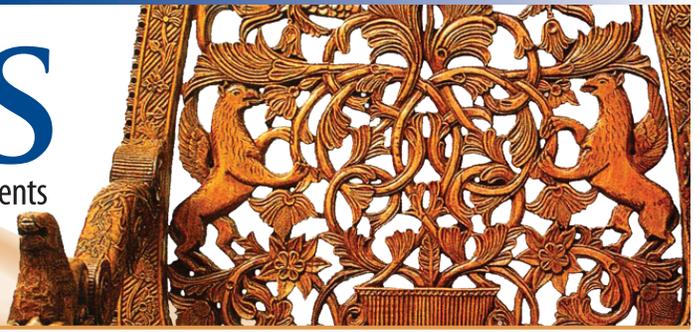


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Let Go and Let God

By Yossi Katz

TISHA B'AV is often called the saddest day of the Jewish year. It commemorates so many tragedies, including the destruction of both Holy Temples, the Spanish Inquisition and European pogroms. On Tisha B'Av, we sit on the floor and weep as we remember everything that was lost, and recite many special prayers that bring us to the appropriate frame of mind. Sounds kind of depressing, no? But what is sadness, or better yet in Breslov terminology, “brokenheartedness,” all about? Why is it a must, and why do we have a special day dedicated to cultivating it?

Let's differentiate between brokenheartedness and depression (and all the more moderate forms of it). The Kotzker Rebbe famously said, “There is nothing as full as a broken heart.” Similarly, Rebbe Nachman taught, “Brokenheartedness and depression are not at all the same. Brokenheartedness involves the heart, while depression involves the spleen. Depression comes from the Other Side and is hated by God. But a broken heart is very dear and precious to God” (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #41). We even have a litmus test to distinguish between the two: “After brokenheartedness comes joy. This later joy is a true sign of a broken heart” (*ibid.* #45). Clearly, brokenheartedness is a healthy and necessary emotion. It is even something that fosters future joy.

I have struggled through certain physical aches and pains over the past few months and begun doing some gym work with a personal trainer. I learned that there are two ways to embolden a muscle: by stretching and by strengthening. Stretching muscles causes them to expand. Strengthening muscle means applying a great deal of tension and resistance, forcing the muscles to contract.

This is a great metaphor for our discussion. Imagine a heart expanding and then contracting. The expansion corresponds to the heart's capacity for love and kindness, which manifests as joy. The contraction corresponds to the heart's capacity for restraint. Longing for something that you can't have right now is an example of something that creates resistance and contracts the heart. Both joy and restraint are necessary to maintain a healthy heart, emotionally and spiritually. However, a depressed person's heart is entirely different. It is cold and stone-like. Such a person experiences anger and possibly rage (based on *Tanya*, chapter 31).

Every generation has the capacity and responsibility to bring the Mashiach and rebuild the Holy Temple. Therefore, if the Mashiach hasn't come yet, we can be said to be responsible for the Temple's destruction. Likewise, each of us has the duty to bring redemption to our personal acts of destruction. By reflecting on these acts – broken relationships, missed opportunities, lack of progress, forgotten aspirations – we create the resistance necessary to strengthen our hearts and repair our wounds.

Tisha B'Av is an incredible opportunity! It is the day we can finally turn to God and let go. We can admit that we don't have the answers and that we hope for so much more. This is precisely what God is waiting for. As our Rabbis teach, “Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit seeing its joy” (*Taanit* 30b). Because by opening our hearts up to God, we are creating room for Him, as well as the space necessary for experiencing future joy and celebration. With every lamentation we say, we remember our losses and lacks, but simultaneously we remember our powerful hope and faith that our hearts will once again beat in tremendous joy and future consolation. Amen!

Look Up!

ONE OF THE REBBE'S followers, Reb Chaikel, had a relative who was extremely poor. Once, while traveling with Rebbe Nachman, Reb Chaikel instructed the wagon driver to stop at this relative's house. Inside, Reb Chaikel pointed out the man's poverty and asked the Rebbe to give him a blessing for wealth.

The Rebbe said to Reb Chaikel, "I have no blessings for him. If you want him to have a blessing, you give it."

After making certain that he'd heard correctly, and obtaining the Rebbe's assurances that he wouldn't mind his "presumptuousness," Reb Chaikel emptied a pitcher of water across the floor. Then he spread the water in all directions, saying, "Abundance to the east, abundance to the west, north and south!" Then Rebbe Nachman and Reb Chaikel left.

Shortly afterward, a group of merchants came to this man's home seeking to purchase food and drink. When the man told them that he had none, they gave him money to buy it for them. From then on, whenever these merchants came to the area, they would lodge at the man's house, and they eventually commissioned him to sell their wares for them. Before long, the man prospered and became very wealthy.

Before, whenever he came to Breslov, this man had always made certain to visit the Rebbe. But now, the more he prospered, the more engrossed he became in his business dealings. He no longer had the time to visit the Rebbe.

Once, while rushing around Breslov on business, he passed by the Rebbe's house. Rebbe Nachman saw him and called him in. "Did you glance at the sky today?" the Rebbe asked him. The man replied that he hadn't. Calling him to the window, the Rebbe said, "Tell me what you see." "I see wagons and horses and people scurrying about," the man replied.

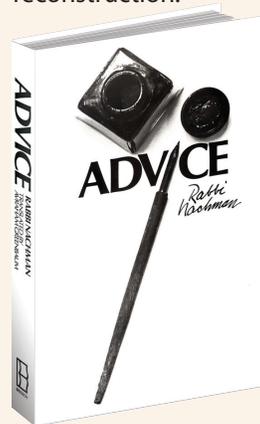
"Believe me," Rebbe Nachman said, "fifty years from now there will be other market days. There will be other horses, other wagons, different people. What is here today will no longer be. I ask you, what pressure are you under? What's making you so busy that you don't even have time to look at Heaven?"

Based on Kokhavye Or #5, p. 41

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

ENCOURAGEMENT. 27. At times a person can undergo the most terrible decline, and then the fall can be very, very low. There are some who fall so low that the only term for where they are is the "filthy places." Such a person can become wracked with doubts, morbid thoughts and mental turbulence. His heart races, because the "husks" torment and circle the heart with every kind of confusion. It may seem impossible to find God in such places, but the very act of searching for God from there, asking and seeking "Where is the place of His glory?" – in itself can bring healing and reconstruction.



The more a person sees how far he is from God's glory, the more grief-stricken he should become. He should search even more intently and ask, "Where is the place of His glory?" Through the very act of searching and seeking and longing for God's glory with anguish, cries, questions ... through this alone, he will attain the ultimate ascent – he will be worthy of

ascending to the level of "Where?" which is the most exalted holiness.

The essence of repentance is to search at all times, "Where is the place of His glory?" Then the fall will be transformed into a great advance. Understand this well, for it is very deep (*Likutey Moharan II, 12*).



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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.