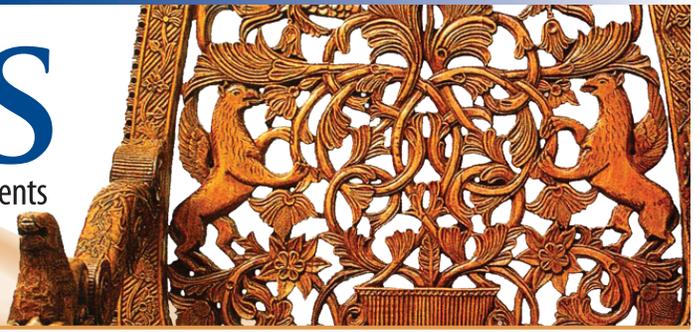


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Shining Light

By Yossi Katz

IF I WERE to ask someone if they were looking forward to Yom Tov, most likely they wouldn't think I was referring to Yom Kippur. Probably I meant Sukkos, in which case their answer would be a resounding "Yes!" Somehow, the holiest day of the year – itself a Yom Tov – is difficult for us to relate to. We understand and appreciate its significance, but its observance tends to feel more like an important obligation than a meaningful and exceptional opportunity.

In truth, God, in His outstanding compassion, has blessed us with an incredibly special day to recreate our relationship with Him. We need only understand a little bit of the mechanics behind this day to embrace this once-a-year opportunity.

In Hebrew, the word for "sin" is *chet*, which literally means "to miss," like someone who is off target. When we observe the Torah's commandments properly, we live a life of spiritual alignment and thus are blessed with plentiful spiritual and material bounty to enjoy our existence and closeness with God. However, when we fail to observe the Torah properly, we fall out of line and sink with the spiritual realities of this world.

Rebbe Nachman compares our veering off the path to a wild and crazed horse. Imagine a horse running around untamed, doing whatever it felt like in its "horse mind." Obviously, its owner would not be very pleased. So he decides to teach the horse to behave appropriately by pounding it with his fist. His friend, watching what's going on, laughs at the owner. "You're only going to hurt yourself by pounding your horse," he screams at him.

In His great love for us, God fashioned us in His image and gave each of us a Divine portion – our precious *neshamah* (soul). Although God can punish us to bring us back into line, by doing so He harms Himself

in the process. Since He has invested Himself in us, by diminishing us in any way He is also divesting from His own personification. Therefore it is written, "In all their pain is His own pain" (Isaiah 63:9). Much like the owner of the wild, crazed horse, God desires to restore His creations to their proper existence. Therefore He gave us the special day of Yom Kippur in order to atone for our misguided decisions, so that all punishments and harsh decrees can be annulled and cancelled.

God wants to be the shining light in our lives. He desires profound closeness with each of His creations. However, He also has given us the free will to choose what type of life we would like to live. When we make poor decisions, God hides Himself from us. Rebbe Nachman says that while God sits weeping, His tears extinguish His precious light and replace it with ashes.

The *Zohar* teaches that a captive cannot free himself from captivity. During Yom Kippur, God sits and waits for each of us to do just that. We do this not by praying in the merit of our good deeds, or by thinking that our repentance will truly justify our being forgiven. In actuality, we are not truly worthy. However, God has purposely invested Himself in each of us. He waits like a captive for us to redeem our relationship with Him. Through our crying, we are recognizing that He has shed tears because of us; He has hidden His benevolent light from us and this pains Him as it affects Him personally.

Therefore Rebbe Nachman teaches that we pray, for the sake of His great Name that He has proclaimed upon us, that God forgive us. God has purposely cast His lot with us and waits patiently for us. By humbling ourselves before Him, He will take the ashes (*APhaR*) and transform them into a beautiful future together (*Pe'ER*).

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 66; Likutey Halakhot, Lulav VeEsrog 1

Look at Yourself the Right Way

By Yehudis Golshevsky

A CHASSID ONCE approached Rebbe Nachman with a heartfelt question. “Rebbe, I feel like such a lowly person. The negative way that I see myself permeates my life and I have a hard time being happy. How can I ever succeed?” The Rebbe responded that you are never allowed to lose confidence in yourself. And the surest way to revitalize yourself is to focus on your good points. Think about it, he told the chassid. Isn't there anything good, any mitzvah, you've ever done?

A person needs to say to himself, “Don't I fast on Yom Kippur, Tisha B'Av and the other obligatory fast days even when I feel sick? Don't I sometimes go to the mikvah? No matter how bad it is, I still have some good points. On some occasions, I really have done the Creator's will.”

Isn't there anything good, any mitzvah, you've ever done?

Searching for and finding one's good points will strengthen and revitalize you. And if that internal negativity returns and rears its head, threatening to overcome you, go back over those same good points again and again.

You can also pour out your heart to God, mentioning every single good point or quality that you have, even the simplest ones, even things that were done not through your own efforts, but are still mitzvot.

For example: “Master of the world! However I am, however sorry my spiritual state, as You and I know the pain I bear, You have still done an astounding kindness for me by making me a Jew. After eight days, they gave me a *brit*. I worked hard to learn the *aleph-bet*, to pray and study the Torah. I endured many painful experiences to attain this knowledge. I worked hard for it ...”

When Reb Noson met someone who was having a hard time focusing on his good points, he encouraged him, “You need to follow all the different paths of advice that Rebbe Nachman revealed to help you find joy, especially by focusing on your good points. And be aware: One's entire connection to Judaism depends on this!”

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:156; Eiruvei Techumim 6

SIDEPATH

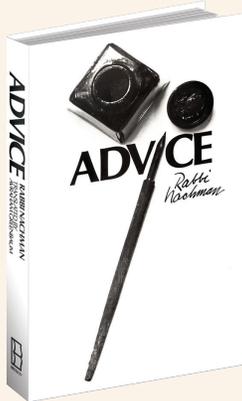
Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

PERCEPTIONS OF GODLINESS. 4. Know that there is a light which is above the *nefesh, ruach* and *neshamah* of human souls. This is the Light of the Infinite. It cannot be attained through intellect. ... It is through fulfilling the mitzvot in joy that we can become worthy of attaining this light. We chase after it, only to encounter “that which holds back.” We can “reach, yet not reach.” ... Happy is the one whose thought chases after this awareness, even though the mind has not the power to attain it (see *Zohar I, 65a; Likutey Moharan I, 24*).

5. The whole purpose of life is to come to know God. But it is impossible to attain any apprehension of Godliness except through innumerable “contractions” from level

to level, from cause to effect, from the Supreme Mind to the Lower Mind. Therefore one must search for a teacher who is on such a level that he has the power to guide him and communicate all that he needs to understand. To be able to do this, the teacher must possess true greatness. The lower one's level, the greater the teacher one needs, because only the greatest will

have the skill to elucidate the subject in the right way, with the appropriate preparatory explanations and introductions. These are the “contractions” through which even a person on a very low level can come to a perception of Godliness (*ibid. I, 30:1,2*).



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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.