

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Two Ways to Go

By Yossi Katz

Being a father of twin boys, I naturally keep comparing them to see the minute differences between them. Who is cuter? Who is smarter? Who is funnier? As they get older, it's interesting to observe their unique relationship. Having so many similarities creates a very, special tight-knit bond, something I don't see in the relationships between my other children.

Our Matriarch Rebecca's experience with her twin boys was entirely different. When they were still in the womb, they displayed completely opposite tendencies. When she would walk by a yeshivah, one would begin kicking to come out. She then would pass by a house of idol worship, and the other would try to come out. The two were already at war with each other, constantly fighting (see *Midrash Rabbah, Toldot*).

All of this "inner action" created perhaps the world's most difficult pregnancy! But it didn't end there. When Rebecca finally gives birth, the Torah recounts, "And his (Jacob's) hand was gripping the heel of Esau" (Genesis 25:26). Why the heel?

Reb Noson explains that the days shortly before the arrival of the Mashiach, the era we are living in right now, is called *ikvasa d'Meshicha* (literally, the "heels of Mashiach"). Jacob's "hand" is symbolic of prayer, as one usually raises his hands heavenward while engaged in deep prayer. (We also find that Moses raised his hands in prayer on behalf of the people as they battled Esau's grandchildren, the Amalekites, a few generations later.) The message is that whenever we experience Esau's "heel" attempting to trample us, we need to remember to grab hold of it with the "hand of Jacob" — namely, prayer and faith.

The children of Esau were the ones who sent our nation into exile, and each of us continues to experience inner exile because of our lack of faith. Our lives are filled with constant pressures, be they work-related, health-related, financial, and so on. We also suffer from emotional stress and negative feelings. All these are signs of inner spiritual exile. To understand how to get ourselves out of this exile, we have to know how we got ourselves into it in the first place.

The answer is that we mistakenly placed our trust in the tactics of Esau. Esau was a hunter; his physical strength was his way of life. Similarly, when we think we can solve our own problems through "natural means," or the "strength and power of my hand" (Deuteronomy 8:17), we run into trouble. Our natural abilities and seemingly logical solutions don't bring about our salvation, and our trust in these solutions leads to emotional duress. We are, in essence, being let down by their lack of effectiveness.

The real solution is the way of Jacob. Rebbe Nachman teaches that the most powerful weapon in the world is prayer. By strengthening our faith and relying on prayer to solve our problems, we not only gain a true answer to our issues, but we also free ourselves from having to deal with all of the emotional drama that results from taking matters into our own hands.

Rebecca's difficult pregnancy mirrors our own decision-making. We can choose to "free ourselves" by emulating the tactics of Esau — worship of our natural abilities. Or we can "give birth" to Jacob, and live a life of prayer and personal redemption.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Yayin Nesach 4
A gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

Now, my son, fortify yourself with all your strength to grab hold of your thoughts, however you can! When you are transacting business, put your mind to that; let it be with joy and without anger, sadness, worries or depression. While praying, force your thoughts into what you are saying and bind them to your words with a tight, powerful bond. If your mind does suddenly fly off in some other direction, grab it forcefully, like a horse by its halter, and pull it back to the holy words of your prayers. (Letter #433)



Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

Esau said to Jacob, “Feed me some of that red, red stuff” (Genesis 25:30)

Esau's eating is gluttonous: “Feed me.” In contrast, a Jew must practice patience in his eating habits. First he arises in the morning and recites his prayers. Then he washes his hands and recites the blessing over food. Only then can he begin to eat. Likewise, before partaking of meat, he must slaughter the ox, remove its blood and fats, and so on.

All these preliminaries teach patience, helping us ascend beyond the level of Esau, the level of “Feed me” (*Likutey Halakhot III*, p. 15a).

{ *A Jew must practice patience
in his eating habits.* }

Now we can understand the Talmud's account of the eating habits of Hillel and Shammai.

The Talmud relates that Shammai would always eat to honor Shabbat. Whenever he found a nice cut of meat, he would set it aside to eat on Shabbat. But if, the following day, he found a piece of meat that was even nicer, he would eat the first piece and set aside the second piece for Shabbat. In this way, he always drew the honor of Shabbat into his weekday meals. Hillel, on the other hand, ate every day according to the blessing God bestowed on that particular day (*Beitzah 16a*).

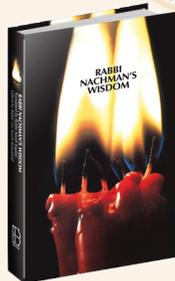
Why didn't Hillel choose to eat daily a portion set aside for Shabbat? And why didn't Shammai eat according to the blessing of that day?

The answer is that Shammai was known to be severe and short-tempered. His personality type was reminiscent of Esau, who was impatient. In order for Shammai to overcome his impatience, he had to draw the sanctity of Shabbat—the day of rest—into his weekdays to help him overcome his impatience. But Hillel was a man of patience. Therefore he was able to draw blessing every day—and blessing represents Shabbat (*Likutey Halakhot III*, p. 30).

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

75. The Rebbe often spoke with us about prayer. He constantly told us to force ourselves to pray with devotion, strongly binding our thoughts to each word and listening very carefully to the words we are saying. You may sometimes pray with great devotion. But then the feeling departs and the words begin to seem empty. Do not be discouraged. Continue the service, saying each word in absolute simplicity. Force yourself to say each word of the service. Make believe you are a child just learning to read, and simply say the words. In most cases, God will then touch your heart with a flame and it will be aroused to pray with



feeling.

For deep inside, you are very far from prayer. Prayer is very high. It is even above the study of Torah. How can you be worthy of serving God in such a lofty manner? Do your part. Simply begin the words of the service, “*Adon Olam Asher Malakh* — Lord of the world, Who reigned...” Listen to every word you say. Concentrate and do not let your thoughts stray. Simply keep your mind on the words of the service. Continue word by word, page by page, until God helps you achieve a feeling of devotion. And even if you complete the entire service without feeling, it is not the end. You can still say a Psalm. There are other prayers to be said.



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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 in the Memory (L'Ilui Nishmat) of Yehudis bat Shimon