

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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And The King Extended His Golden Scepter

By Yossi Katz

OK, so we were spared. And for over 2000 years, Jews have celebrated the holiday of Purim. But what's so special about Purim? Haven't we seen innumerable villains rise up against us, trying to destroy our nation? Don't we declare in the Passover Haggadah every year, "In every generation, they rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand"?

Furthermore, we celebrate Passover because the Jews were freed from bondage and were eventually led to the Holy Land, not to mention receiving the Torah and becoming a nation along the way. After the Purim miracle, the Jews were still stuck in Persia under the evil King Achashveirosh. Isn't this a far cry from the miracles of the Redemption from Egypt, or even the Chanukah story where at least we defeated the enemy and reclaimed our Holy Temple?

The Megillah begins by recounting the incredible wealth and grandeur of Achashveirosh and his royal court. The king hosts a world-class party – celebrating, according to our Sages, the expiry date of the prophecy to redeem the Jews. It's been 70 years since the Holy Temple was destroyed and we went into exile. Achashveirosh wants to drive home the message that God has abandoned us and we should fear only him. Audaciously, he adorns himself in the clothing of the Kohen Gadol at the party.

Haman, the archenemy of the Jews, takes his cue from the king and decides now is the opportune time to get rid of the Jews once and for all. To accomplish this, he plans to sever our special connection with God by demanding that everyone bow to him and to the idol that he's wearing. "But Mordechai would not kneel or bow" (Esther 3:2).

Mordechai the Tzaddik saw through Achashveirosh's and Haman's plot. He wasn't impressed by their honor and glory, because he knew this was only God's honor being manifested through them. Mordechai understood that

if this was the king of Persia's honor, how much greater is the King of the Universe's honor! So Mordechai feared only God.

"The *pur* (lot) was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month [to select the day to annihilate the Jews]" (*ibid.* 3:7). The way of Haman, who represents evil, is to "cast" us down with negativity little by little, day by day, month by month, until we have completely fallen away from our special relationship with God. Even today, Haman frightens the exiled Jew by continually sending him negative messages. "Your enemies have destroyed your Temple – give up!"

Mordechai commanded Esther, who represents the Jewish people, to beseech the king. But Esther replied, "I haven't been summoned in 30 days" (*ibid.* 4:11). She was saying that her relationship with the True King had gotten stale; she didn't feel fit to approach Him anymore. But Mordechai knew that God's love for us is eternal and that Esther had been influenced by Haman's evil mindset. There's no such thing as despair – if we have fallen, we must pick ourselves up again, because there is always hope. Everything can be reversed for the good! So Esther was also able to rise above fear and approach the King.

"And the King extended to Esther the golden scepter" (*ibid.* 5:2). On that day, God showed us that no matter how far one may fall and no matter what mistakes he's made, He will extend Himself to that person and bring about his ultimate triumph.

This is the true miracle of Purim, which is even greater than the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt. Despite the evil Achashveirosh still being in power, God showed us that there is nothing to fear at all. Whether it is the mightiest monarchs threatening us, or our feelings of distance from God, they are all mere illusions. Through the teachings of the Tzaddikim, we can come to know that all negativity can be elevated and used as a medium to bring us closer to the One Above.

*Based on Hilkhot Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah 4
A Freilichen Purim! Purim Samei'ach!*

Purim Strategy

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MEIR TEPLIKER, a close disciple of Reb Noson, had a student who lived in a remote village. Each year, Breslovers from the surrounding area would gather in Teplik at Reb Meir's home for Purim day. Reb Meir would prepare a festive meal that started around noon. He would close his blinds and fill the room with candles so their intimate light would enhance the joy of the gathering. One Purim, during the height of the dancing, Reb Meir noticed this student standing on the side, suffering.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"You don't have anything blocking your *simchah*, but how can I rejoice when my daughters, especially Tzivia, my eldest, are all unmarried and I can't possibly afford their dowry?" the man responded.

Reb Meir exclaimed, "You can't find a better strategy to improve your situation than feeling depressed on Purim?" He grabbed his student and gave him a big hug. "If you are suffering so much, you need to cry out to Hashem again and again, 'My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!'"

Reb Meir drew his student into the circle of joyous, drunken dancers and the man shouted with his entire being: "My heart's pains have grown so great; save me from my troubles!" Reb Meir pressed him: "If things are so bad, one cries out to Hashem like this again and again!" They danced this way, with the student crying out and praying and Reb Meir encouraging him to keep at it, for a long time.

A few days after Purim, another Breslover came to the man's village for a few days and naturally lodged with his friend. On Shabbat he realized that Tzivia, his friend's eldest daughter, was particularly modest and had a sterling character. He was so taken with her that the extent of her dowry was the furthest thing from his mind. "You know, I have a son around your daughter's age," he told his friend. "Maybe we should make a match between them?"

After getting the approval of Reb Meir Tepliker, that is exactly what happened. Everyone saw that by overcoming his sadness to rejoice on Purim and throwing himself into prayer, Reb Meir's student had brought about his own salvation.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI, 59

SIDE PATH

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

106. It is written, "To declare ... Your faith by night" (Psalms 92:3). Faith is a light. You can obtain faith through the wisdom of the Torah. Through such scholarship, you can attain some understanding of God, and this is certainly good. But better still is the faith that shines by night. This is pure faith, without any sophistication or proof. This true faith is a light – "Your faith by night."

107. The Talmud teaches that Esther was of average height, neither tall nor short (*Megillah* 13a). This is the reason. Our Sages teach, "Because of Rachel's modesty,



she was worthy of being a progenitor of Saul. And because of Saul's modesty, he was worthy of having Esther as a descendant" (*ibid.*, 13b).

Regarding Rachel, it is written, "Rachel, your little daughter" (Genesis 29:18) – meaning small in stature. Regarding Saul, it is written, "He was taller than any of the people" (I Samuel 9:2). Esther, the descendant of Rachel and Saul, was therefore of average height.

108. The very language of the *Zohar* is so holy that it can motivate you to serve God. The *Zohar* uses most forceful expressions in speaking about our duty towards God.

When speaking of a person who does good, the *Zohar* says, "Zakah – Worthy is he!" On the other hand, it cries out against a sinner, "Vai! – Woe! Woe is to him! Woe is to the soul who strays from serving God!" (*Zohar* III, 175a). Reading such expressions can greatly influence you to serve God.



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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.