

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Balancing Act

By Yossi Katz

HAVE YOU EVER wondered why Jacob was specifically chosen to father the twelve tribes and establish the Jewish nation? Weren't Abraham and Isaac also fitting figures? Yet despite their greatness, Abraham fathered a "Ishmael" and Isaac fathered an "Esau." What was Jacob's secret to perfection?

The Torah alludes to Esau's essential point by saying, "Isaac loved Esau because he trapped him with his mouth" (Genesis 25:28). Esau would ask Isaac how to tithe things like salt and straw, seemingly demonstrating his rigidness in observing the Torah (see *Midrash Tanchuma, Toldot* 8). Esau's tremendous resolve and exactitude could have earned him greatness, but instead its mismanagement became his greatest flaw.

Isaac did not perceive Esau as being sarcastic and was fooled. He saw in Esau the trait of holy chutzpah, something essential to spiritual success and something Isaac himself mastered. However, as awesome as Isaac was in mastering strictness and rigidness in the service of God, he had not mastered the ability to know when to mitigate this attitude with kindness. This imperfection caused Esau to be too harsh on himself. His narrow-minded approach made him demand nothing less than perfection – an attitude that ultimately leads to dejection.

The major conflict between Jacob and Esau surrounded the birthright. Spiritually, the birthright represents the opening of the womb, the creation of a new channel of influence. Through the birth of the firstborn, the spiritual legacy of the father can be manifest to future generations. All later births are but a continuation of this process. The Torah therefore mandates that the firstborn should receive a double portion of the father's inheritance. This is because he essentially owns the copyright and claims its royalties. He is the master of influence.

The main part of Isaac's estate was the weapon of prayer. Isaac's level of prayer held the keys to both spiritual and physical bounty. Its arms bearer could largely influence the direction of society. Rebecca knew that Jacob had to inherit this rite in order to bring the world toward its rectification. Not only would Esau potentially misuse this ability, but his flaws would inhibit his ever hoping to master its art.

The success of our prayers corresponds directly with our belief in their power. Jacob is called Tiferet Yaakov. Tiferet is the confluence of kindness and severity. Jacob is called "the wholesome one" (Genesis 25:27) because he mastered this most difficult balance. Kindness without restriction is like giving a child unlimited candy. But restriction for its own sake serves no purpose. Jacob's balancing act helped him understand that while none of his prayers were ever truly deserving of God's blessings, nevertheless, God still listens to and answers every prayer. His kindness and compassion are so great that every one of our prayers has tremendous value on high.

The more we perfect our trust and belief in God's appreciation for our efforts, the more potent our prayers become. When we reach this understanding and then experience salvation vis-à-vis prayer, we open the channel for all future prayers. We then become worthy of inheriting its capabilities.

Esau, in contrast, did not properly perceive God's incredible kindness. He could not fathom how anything less than perfection could be acceptable to the Master of the Universe. Therefore he could not inherit this potentially powerful weapon.

As the children of Jacob, we have inherited both a mighty weapon and a constant companion to face our daily challenges. Let us mitigate our negative thoughts by turning to God and relying on His never-ending compassion and love. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhot Nachalat 4

Child's Play

By Yehudis Golshevsky

FROM HIS EARLIEST years, Rebbe Nachman set lofty goals for himself. Just like the desire to see the “light of Shabbat” had consumed him, little Nachman aspired to experience God’s presence on a constant basis – to fulfill King David’s words, “I have placed God before me always” (Psalms 16:8). These yearnings led the growing boy to act in ways that were sometimes difficult for others to understand.

He knew that the great tzaddikim “ate to live” and didn’t “live to eat,” so he decided to swallow his food without chewing it, to avoid tasting its delights. (Later in life, Rebbe Nachman admitted that had he known the true power of *hitbodedut*, personal prayer, he wouldn’t have undertaken such self-destructive practices.) His mother was always protective of his health, and so little Nachman would try to carry out his resolve away from her watchful eyes.

Nachman knew that tzaddikim spent a great deal of time in private meditation and prayer...but how was a young child like himself going to find enough unsupervised time to commune with his Creator? During his early years, Nachman realized that as long as adults believe that a child is at play, he is usually left to himself. And so the young tzaddik developed a manner that he would come to rely on later in life: He would pretend to be involved in some other activity while, in truth, he was busy pursuing his spiritual goals.

So little Nachman made sure to act the part of any other young child: he would run wild, play with friends, be mischievous, amuse himself with games...and disappear into the fields and forests for hours at a time, searching for God.

One day, while in school, little Nachman appeared to be daydreaming. When his teacher couldn’t get his attention, he rebuked the boy. How was the teacher to know that Nachman was forming the Divine Name before his eyes, focusing on higher things?

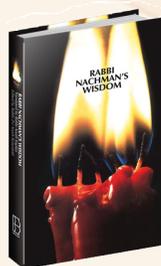
Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 66-69

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l

288. The Rebbe once spoke to a man and quoted the Talmudic edict, “Repent one day before your death” (*Avot* 2:10; *Shabbat* 153a). The Rebbe stressed the words *one day*, drawing them out at great length.

Yesterday and tomorrow are a person’s downfall. Today, you may be aroused towards God. But yesterday and tomorrow pull you back. No matter where a person stands, he suffers reverses. The one who dwells on yesterday and tomorrow will surely fall away. Therefore the Rebbe stressed, “Repent *one day* before your death.”



“Before your death” is your entire life.

During your entire lifetime, you may be worthy of only one day of repentance. This one day is more precious than every treasure. For what does man gain from all his effort? Nothing remains of all your life other than this one day of repentance before God.

“Repent *one day*” – even one day – “before your death” – during your sojourn here on earth. Forget about yesterday and tomorrow. This one day is everything. Understand this.

289. The Rebbe once said, “A person who is not trapped by his money and does not trade beyond his means fulfills the commandment, ‘You should love the Lord your God...with all your might’” (Deuteronomy 6:5). He engages in honest business using his own money. The Rebbe also said that this commandment is fulfilled by one who gives a fifth of his income to charity.



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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.