

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Shame On Me!

By Yossi Katz

IT'S THAT TIME of year again: National Teshuvah Month, aka Chodesh Elul. In “honor” of this special time of year, Breslover Chassidim customarily study Lesson #6 of Rebbe Nachman's *Likutey Moharan*. I highly recommend it, as it provides the necessary framework to achieve a real and productive *teshuvah*.

My own recollection of this time period while at yeshivah was of a frightful period in which we were under immense pressure to cram in the perfect month of religious achievement in order to “stand” a chance while standing before God on Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment. The mere mention of the word “Elul” would send a shiver down my spine. Now, Rosh HaShanah is certainly no joking matter and the judgment is very real. But in order to properly understand this day, let's look at what *teshuvah* is really all about.

People usually translate *teshuvah* as repentance. I think that definition works very well with the unsophisticated version that I witnessed as a youth. I remember seeing people with an expanded edition of the *Al Chets* that are recited on Yom Kippur. This looked something like a phone book. Yeshivah boys would stand for hours reciting every single entry, making sure they technically covered all points of any possible transgression. I think they felt like they had truly repented. While I appreciate their sincerity and can't say that I had their stamina, Rebbe Nachman describes something very different.

Have you ever seen an animal wear a medal, the latest hairstyle, or Air Jordans? Humans do, because we have the desire to feel important; we crave honor. This stems from our very makeup: our souls were taken from beneath God's Throne of Honor and want to be elevated back to their source. But Godly honor is not easy to achieve. First we must utterly humble and

nullify ourselves before God. Since this is hard to do, it's easier to seek out base forms of honor like ego, pride and selfishness.

Teshuvah literally means “return” and is the process of approaching God. The laws of *teshuvah* require a person to feel shame about his or her misdeeds. Rebbe Nachman expands on this concept, explaining that we have this experience any time we hear our shame, yet remain silent. This could be our boss yelling at us, our spouse accusing us, or our friend insulting us. All these are Heaven-sent opportunities that provide us with the means to negate our ego and allow God in, initiating the process of ultimately returning to Him. By remaining silent, we acknowledge that we were insulted because of our inflated ego, and welcome the opportunity to nurture a healthy self-worth based on our spiritual greatness rather than something that others think of us.

Even more relevant is when we insult ourselves. Often we make spiritual goals and plans, and guess what? Things don't go the way we expected. We feel down and beaten, ready to throw in the towel. *Teshuvah* is about accepting failure and still believing in change. I can be happy with my efforts and take joy in knowing they are meaningful to God, no matter whether I reached my goal yet or not. This demonstrates that my *teshuvah* was not an act of spiritual egotism, but was truly for the sake of Heaven. Only this is real growth and change. Only this allows us to serve God in every situation that life throws at us.

Shame is a beautiful device, but unfortunately is becoming endangered. It is difficult to swallow only if we have an inflated ego and can't accept that we all make mistakes and look forward to becoming better people. But shame is the hallmark of a Jew. If we truly desire closeness to God, we should lovingly and “shamelessly” embrace it.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, 6

Temper, Temper

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN REB NOSON heard that his son was having a hard time controlling his temper, he gently encouraged him, “My dear son, for God’s sake, have mercy on yourself and on your family, and refrain from acting out in anger. If you don’t let anything anger or irritate you, you will be happy in this world and in the next!

“Anger and resentment can cause so much damage, may God protect us. Our Sages teach that the furious person gains nothing from his temper, other than feeling overwrought. Any benefit that one hopes to gain through anger could have been achieved much more effectively through calm discussion. As the verse states, “The words of the wise, when spoken calmly, are heard.”

Rebbe Nachman gave a powerful example of the benefit of finding workable strategies for avoiding anger.

One cold winter day, a Breslover chassid paid Rebbe Nachman a visit. He was surprised to be met by the acrid smell of smoke billowing through the open front door. He ran into the house and saw that the wood in the potbellied stove desperately needed tending, but the housemaid hadn’t done it. He raised a ruckus and opened some windows. Then he explained to the young girl just how dangerous her daydreaming could have been. After that, he approached the Rebbe’s room.

Upon entering, it became clear that this room, too, had been filled with smoke just moments before. The chassid wondered aloud why the Rebbe had not brought the housemaid’s oversight to her attention. Was there some kind of deep reason behind his inaction?

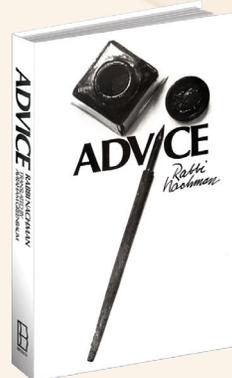
Rebbe Nachman answered patiently, “The helper isn’t that attentive and it often takes a few times to get her to do her job. It’s human nature that the first time one asks a hired worker to do what is obviously her job and should require no reminders, one still uses a pleasant tone of voice. The second time, one raises his voice. The third time, one gets angry. I therefore ignore all of her slip-ups. It is so much better to remain silent from the outset!”

Based on Alim LiTerufah #446; Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:107

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 8. The prosperity and greatness of the nations of the world will in the end turn out to be for our own ultimate good. It may be impossible to understand this at the present time: we cannot deny the realities of our situation and our experiences. But in the future, understanding will grow to the point where even the nations of the world themselves will



know and understand that all the greatness and advantages they enjoy today are really for our benefit (*Likutey Moharan I*, 21:11).

9. In time to come, the whole world will be purified and all will become worthy of knowing God, even the nations of the world. As it is written, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God like the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). But there will be a great difference between the understanding they will attain and ours. Even within the Jewish people itself, there will be great differences between the various Tzaddikim, and even more so between the just and the wicked. The perceptions granted to each one will depend on the struggles and bitterness he endured in this world for the sake of God. These Tzaddikim will become “burned” by these perceptions in the sense of being stirred and aroused by them, even though they seem very simple in the eyes of the Tzaddik who attained them in this world (*ibid.*).



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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.