

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Day of Love, Not Fear

By Yossi Katz

YOM KIPPUR IS not the easiest day on the Jewish calendar. Our Rabbis teach that really, Yom Kippur was supposed to last two days outside of the Land of Israel, much like every other festival. But they saw that this would be too difficult for the Jews to keep. I often take encouragement from this and, as the day progresses, with every passing minute, I remind myself that I am heading towards the finish line.

All kidding aside, Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It's a day we want to take advantage of and connect with, not one for snoozing.

The idea of sin and atonement brings up the question of God's role in punishing us. We often have the mistaken notion that God waits for us to slip and sin, and then coldly strikes us in an instant spur of retribution.

For this reason, Yom Kippur is a dreadful day for many of us and amounts to little more than a mechanical self-defense process.

In *Likutey Moharan* II, 66, Rebbe Nachman explains our being punished as akin to someone attempting to tame a wild horse by pounding it with his fist; he's only hurting himself. When God punishes us, Rebbe Nachman teaches, the punishment does not end there; God is pained together with us.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe ascended to Heaven and begged for forgiveness on behalf of the

Jewish people. Moses said, "[If You aren't going to forgive them,] wipe me out." God answered him, "He who has sinned against Me, I will wipe him out." Moses requested that God forgive us for the sake of His great Name, which is associated with our name (see Exodus 32).

Moshe was arguing that by punishing the Jews, God would be harming Himself. Therefore we say throughout the Yom Kippur service, "I (God) have forgiven according to your (Moses') word."

Throughout the *Likutey Moharan*, Rebbe Nachman constantly shows how things that we perceive as punishment are actually being done out of love, in order to bring about our *teshuvah* (repentance) and *tikkun* (rectification). (For example, *Likutey Moharan* I, 6 explains how helpful embarrassment is.)

Reb Noson once said, "The Rebbe's whole essence is Rosh HaShanah. Mine is Yom Kippur!" (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh* 1-662). Even as he left the world, Reb Noson was mindful of his mission, repeating again and again, "*Chanun ha-marbeh lislo'ach*—[God is] gracious and abundant in forgiveness." There is hope for all – God will forgive!

Reb Noson taught us that God is a compassionate God. On Yom Kippur, He waits for us to pick up on the cues we are being constantly being sent. As Moses revealed to us, God does not want to harm Himself.

This is a day for us to realize the great love that God has for us, and for us to express and regret all the things that have held us apart until today. This year we will become aware of these roadblocks, and we will certainly be forgiven. Amen.

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.”

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 ...”

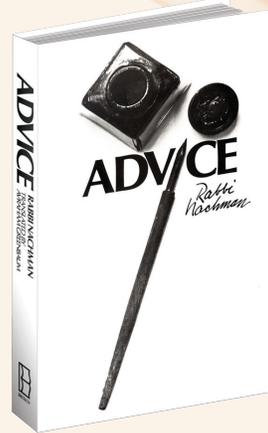
When Reb Noson met someone who was having a hard time focusing on his good points, he encouraged him, “You need to follow all the different paths of advice that Rebbe Nachman revealed to help you find joy, especially by focusing on your good points. And be aware: One's entire connection to Judaism depends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

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

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

19. A person who masters his evil inclination and subdues it is like an angel of the Lord of Hosts, and he can find letters of Torah even where materialism is rampant. Even when he is in contact with non-Jews and sees their behavior, he is aware of the Godly vitality – the letters of Torah – which are clothed in it. The secrets of Torah – the hidden Torah of the Ancient of Days – will be revealed to him (*Likutey Moharan I, 33:3*).



20. As one goes from level to level and draws closer and closer to God, his knowledge and understanding of God will become greater and greater, and his ability to love God will grow more and more (*ibid. I, 33:4*).

21. Every Jew knows in general terms that God exists. By rights the mere fact that he knows this should be enough to make him subdue all his animal impulses and bad character traits. But “the evil are under the sway of their hearts” (*Bereishit Rabbah 34*), and the heart is the seat of all the passions and character traits. This is why it is so important to bind one's heart to one's understanding. ... As one develops this awareness, he should be able to break and eliminate all his impulses and then he will be worthy of the light of love which is within understanding (*ibid. I, 33:7*).



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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.