

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Power of Free Choice

By Yossi Katz

AFTER CENTURIES OF BONDAGE, the poor Israelite slaves emerge victorious and triumphant over their Egyptian taskmasters. Making their way through the desert, they approach Mount Sinai and the ultimate purpose of Creation, where the lowest of the low rise to become God's chosen people.

Moses delivers God's question to the Hebrews: "Will you accept the Torah and thereby become a treasure among the nations?"

They answer, "All that God has spoken, we will do."

Moses then brings the people's reply to God and God informs Moses that He will appear to him and the people will hear what He says.

But then we read one of the most puzzling verses in the Torah: "Moses relayed the people's reply to God" (Exodus 19:9). But Moses had already relayed the people's response to God; we don't find that God asked the Jewish people any further questions!

Rebbe Nachman explains what transpired behind the scenes. When the Jews replied, "All that God has spoken, we will do," they were actually *objecting* to God's question. "If God tells us outright what to do, how can we possibly maintain our free will? We will *have* to do it," they said.

This was the question that Moses presented before God.

God responded that He would appear to Moses specifically and address the commandments to him alone. The Jewish people would hear them only as bystanders, thus retaining an element of freedom of choice.

But then Moses asked, "What about *my* free choice?" When "Moses related the people's reply to God," says

Rebbe Nachman, he was repeating the Jewish people's objection, but this time about himself!

God answered by giving Moses an opportunity to use his free will.

God said, "Go to the Jewish people and sanctify them today and tomorrow" (and then the Torah would be given). Moses decided on his own that two days of preparation weren't enough, and commanded the Jewish people to add a third day (see *Shabbat* 87a for Moses' calculation). God agreed with Moses' decision.

Remarkably, this means that the giving of the Torah was contingent on Moses' free choice—and had Moses not added the extra day, the Jewish people would not have had the necessary level of holiness to receive the Torah!

Our lives today are no different than those of our forefathers. Although we have already received the Torah, and hundreds of thousands of pages of commentary have been written on it, God's will is still very much hidden from us. For example, which mitzvah should I do now? Should I study Torah or do an act of kindness? Not only this, but I have many problems. Where does the Torah point to the exact solution for my issues?

In order to find our individual paths within Judaism, we need to attach ourselves to the proper teacher/Tzaddik—we need to find our Moses. All of this has to be done on our own and is not explicitly specified.

How do we go about this?

Just as the Torah alludes to the hidden exchange between God, Moses and the Jewish people, if we concentrate on our eternal purpose, and truly yearn for the absolute truth, we will discover the hints along the way that lead us to our own personal "giving of the Torah." Amen.

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 190;
Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

The U.S.-Israel Connection

By Chaim Kramer

RABBI ZVI ARYEH ROSENFELD, a pioneering Breslov educator who spread Rebbe Nachman's teachings in North America beginning in the 1940s, had a very deep love for the Land of Israel.

While he reached out to Jews who were distant from God and taught many adults and children the basics of Torah and mitzvot, he would always try to strengthen his connection with the Holy Land. In addition to traveling to Israel over 50 times, he collected charity to support the Breslover chassidim living in Jerusalem, and raised most of the funds for the construction of the Breslov yeshivah in Mea Shearim.

When he began teaching young students in New York City, Rabbi Rosenfeld instilled in them both the love of the Land and the greatness of charity.

In the early 1950s, in agreement with the Breslover chassidim in Jerusalem, he set up a system called ma'amadot (literally, "position," "standing" or "rank"). For the going rate of \$1.10 per month, each boy among his students who wanted to join would become a "partner" with a chassid in Jerusalem and have a share in the latter's Torah study and service of God.

In the 1950s, this was a lot of money for a young boy. The boy would give his own 10 cents and then have to raise the remaining dollar for charity!

But this connection served to strengthen the ties between Rabbi Rosenfeld and his students, as well as between Rabbi Rosenfeld and the chassidim in Israel, and had a profound impact on the American boys who were subsequently inspired to travel to the Holy Land themselves.

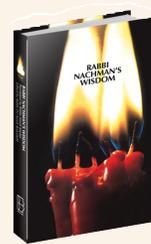
SIDEPATH

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

130. I heard that the Rebbe once spoke about famous miracle workers. He used the following parable:

Once there was a king who had two sons, one wise and the other foolish. He put the fool in charge of all his treasuries. The wise son, on the other hand, was not given any position, and just sat beside the king continually.

The people found this very difficult to understand. Here the son who was totally devoid of wisdom was given all the authority and had to be approached every time someone wished to deposit or withdraw anything from the king's treasury. On the other hand, the wise son had no authority at all.



The king answered, "What is so special about disbursing money from an existing treasury? My wise son, however, sits beside me and uses his mind. Many times he comes up with a new idea that would never have occurred to me. He may tell me about lands I have never heard about and show me how to conquer them. This is how I build up my treasury.

"My son, the overseer, does not do anything to add to my treasury. He merely distributes what I already have.

"My wise son is therefore much more important than his brother, even if it appears that he does not have a position of authority. For he is the one responsible for acquiring the treasury in the first place."



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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.