

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Silver Lining

By Yossi Katz

WHEN IT RAINS, it pours. It often happens this way: first you have one problem, then another comes up, then a third... Before you know it, you feel completely overburdened, as if you can't even breathe. You imagine all of the world's issues being lumped together and heaped on your shoulders. But it gets even worse.

Our typical reaction to feeling overwhelmed is to hibernate in a state of utter disconnect. We cut ourselves off from friends, from our true selves, and especially from God. We feel hopeless and despondent, unable to cry out to our Father in Heaven, the only One who can bring about our salvation. This vicious cycle is summed up by the golden rule, "The more attention you yield to anguish and problems, the more anguish and problems will pursue you."

In order to pacify the anger of his brother Esau, who was upset with him for stealing their father's blessing, Jacob sent a handsome tribute. Everything that Jacob did was with great wisdom. He told Esau, "I have acquired an ox and a donkey" (Genesis 32:6). Then he separated the different species included in his tribute, as he told his servants, "Leave a space between one group and the next" (ibid., 32:17).

According to Kabbalah, the "ox" refers to Esau (see Isaiah 34:5-7) and the "donkey" to Ishmael (Ishmael is called a "wild donkey of a man"; Genesis 16:12). These two adversaries and their attendant nations were to be the rulers and oppressors of the Jewish people in exile. They represent the exile and all of its bitter problems. Whether through physical oppression or by their negative spiritual influence, their ultimate goal is to bring the Jewish nation to the point of utter despair and hopelessness.

Jacob understood that it is precisely when all of our troubles are lumped together at once that we become overwhelmingly despondent, truly exiled from God. He therefore taught us the secret of separating our problems into "groups" and looking for the "spaces" of relief.

Our first survival tactic is to recall our past. How many times were we in similar, seemingly hopeless predicaments, and somehow not only survived but perhaps even prospered from our situation? When we remember our past salvations and express our gratitude to God for taking care of us until now, we reinforce our sense of faith and trust, thereby cultivating the inner-fortitude that we each possess.

But it doesn't end there. While our troubles are not at all easy to deal with and we are truly in pain, Rebbe Nachman teaches that every problem and trouble we face is packaged together with a silver lining. As difficult and as bitter as life can be, God's kindness and love for us is present in every situation. The benefit may not always be obvious – in fact, it may be only our realization that our situation could be much worse. Our job is to find those seemingly hidden threads of relief and, rather than disconnect, use these opportunities to express our gratitude and thanks to God for the little bit of good we have discovered.

When life gets bumpy and we find ourselves emotionally overcome by our constant problems, we can give ourselves breathing room by finding the little specks of good and salvation that exist in between the troubles. By discovering those spaces of relief, we defuse the united front of our enemies and are free to rediscover our greatest weapons: hope, faith and prayer. By wielding this powerful arsenal, we can successfully navigate even the greatest challenge.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Kilay Beheimah 4:8

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Even while a person is experiencing difficulties, and it seems to him as though God is ignoring him completely, he must still remain joyful constantly. Even then he must find some success or some positive side with which to cheer himself. (Letter #59)

Nip It in the Bud

By Yehudis Golshevsky

BRESLOVER CHASSIDIM WOULD say that it's best to be quiet about the good that you do. Letting other people know about your accomplishments leads only to pride, and pride is the enemy of serving God.

Reb Noson was very careful to trim any harmful pride that he found growing within the hearts of his students.

Once his close disciple, Reb Nachman of Tulchin, traveled a long, hard journey to supervise a printing of *Likutey Halakhot*, Reb Noson's magnum opus. Besides the arduousness of the trip, Reb Nachman faced many overwhelming obstacles and dangers as he finished printing the books and smuggled them over the border.

After hearing about his harrowing adventures, the Breslovers felt that Reb Nachman deserved special distinction for having somehow managed a virtually impossible feat. "Perhaps we should begin calling him 'Rebbe Nachman' as a way of showing our vast appreciation?" they suggested.

Reb Nachman was in the room when they presented their idea to Reb Noson, who immediately rejected it. "Is it really so simple in your eyes?" Reb Noson asked. "I don't understand this attitude at all. Don't you know that every good point—even if it is as fragile and apparently insignificant as an eggshell—is priceless? Surely every good deed is worthy of endless praise. So why should you call him 'Rebbe' because of this particular good turn that he's done?"

Reb Noson facetiously added a rhyme in Yiddish: "*Leig em uffen tisch chappin a schmitz*—That makes as much sense as laying him on the table and slapping him up!"

Reb Avrohom, the son of Reb Nachman of Tulchin, explained why Reb Noson had made such a strong point, and had even made a joke about the idea: "Reb Noson knew that this request—made in my father's presence—was very unhealthy for his spiritual well-being, so he nipped it in the bud!"

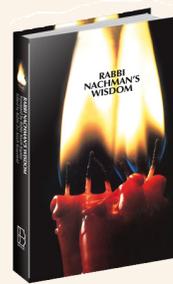
Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:571, III:284

SIDEPATH

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

181. I heard that the Rebbe once said: I know wisdom that cannot be revealed. If I were to reveal this wisdom, people could be nourished by the delight of comprehending it. They would no longer need to eat or drink.

The whole world would nullify themselves with deep longing and desire to hear my wisdom, and people would long for and seek the sweet beauty of this wisdom. But I cannot reveal this wisdom to mankind. As soon as I begin to speak it, I desire to hear and receive lofty things from my listener. I then stop speaking so I can listen and receive from him. Therefore I cannot reveal this unique wisdom.



182. The Rebbe once said, "No one is really opposing me. They are merely opposing a person who is doing the things they fabricate against me, and

they are correct in opposing such a person."

Those who were against the Rebbe invented all sorts of false accusations against him. These accusations were totally without foundation and did not apply to the Rebbe at all.

If they actually knew of the Rebbe's greatness and holiness, they would certainly not oppose him. They would run to follow him with the greatest zeal and enthusiasm. But they are actually opposing a fictitious character of their own making. They created a character who did the things they were accusing the Rebbe of doing. It would certainly be proper to oppose such a person.



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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.