

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Leaving the Frat Boys Behind

By Yossi Katz

RECENTLY I READ an abysmal statistic. According to a 2014 PEW Research Center study, the US marriage rate is at a 93-year low! Just about half of the adult population is not married. While there are various opinions seeking to explain why the rate keeps dropping, one of the most popular suggestions is that many young men would prefer to remain in the “frat boy” stage and aren’t at all interested in investing in a serious, demanding and oftentimes difficult relationship. It’s just so much more tempting to have a good time and avoid commitment.

Rebbe Nachman shares an analogy that has a lot to with this issue:

Sometimes, when people are happy and dance, they grab someone standing outside [the circle] who is depressed and gloomy. Against his will, they bring him into the circle of dancers; against his will, they force him to be happy along with them. It is the same with happiness. When a person is happy, gloom and suffering stand aside.

The Rebbe is describing a popular method used to deal with problems and sadness: *Forget about them.* Allow yourself to be dragged into the circle of fun and joy. The gloominess will remain where it is while you experience happiness. Much of our society has adapted this attitude on various levels. They shy away from dealing with “stuff” and would rather engage in something enjoyable, while leaving their gloom off to the side.

But the Rebbe says this isn’t good enough:

Yet greater still is to gather courage to actually pursue gloom, and to introduce it into the joy, such that the gloom itself turns into joy. A person should transform gloom and all suffering into joy.

Finding contentment in marriage is a lot like having the courage to pursue gloom. Unfortunately, married life isn’t

always as glamorous as the wedding that precedes it. But the skill set that one learns as he or she becomes capable of leading a happy home is priceless. One of our primary missions and a key to living a fulfilled lifestyle is to recognize God’s great compassion and kindness in even the most mundane and difficult situations. The commitment of marriage gives us the opportunity to become mindful of God at a day-to-day level. Only by learning to see the good in every situation can you successfully lead a happy household. By doing so, you reveal that Godliness exists even at the most basic level.

In our *parashah*, we read about Nadav and Avihu bringing a voluntary incense-offering. They were punished with death, something that seems very severe for two holy priests who were being sincere in their contribution to God. The *Zohar* reveals the fundamental flaw in their judgment that led to their error: They never married!

Now, Nadav and Avihu were not part of some priestly college fraternity. They were actually so committed to cleaving to Godliness that they couldn’t imagine being forced to deal with drudgery of married life. One of the ingredients of the incense is galbanum. While the other ten ingredients are sweet-smelling, galbanum is foul-smelling. Much like the vinegar included in a tasty condiment, true joy cannot be experienced unless it is enhanced by a preceding challenge. As Nadav and Avihu sought to elevate the incense, they came face to face with gloom and sadness, whose spiritual roots are associated with death. Because they were lacking the experience and know-how necessary to elevate these, they were drawn to those spiritual roots and passed away.

God does not want us to live solitary lives on holy mountaintops, but rather seek Him specifically in the mundane and in our life challenges. If we understand this well, and consequently invest the necessary patience and motivation, we have the ability to develop massive spiritual muscles that will serve us well throughout our lives and beyond. Amen!

Based on Likutey Moharan II, 23

An Honest Man

By Yehudis Golshevsky

While many people are aware of the great emphasis Rebbe Nachman placed on sanctifying one's intimate life, few realize that financial integrity was no less important to him. Time and again, Rebbe Nachman cried out about the need to be scrupulous in our financial dealings.

Breslovers – who mainly lived plain and simple financial lives – certainly spoke about everyday acts of petty infidelity that people easily fall into, not big offenses like theft or embezzlement.

Rebbe Nachman explicitly outlined the terrible spiritual consequences of such sins – that encroaching on another person's property can trigger illicit thoughts and cause him to lose a *shidduch*, for example. (*Likutey Moharan* I, 69).

Breslover chassidim were always exceedingly careful with other people's money. Even when they saw legal loopholes that would have allowed them to take more than their fair due, or default on a loan, they did not resort to them.

Reb Avraham Sternfeld moved to America and, like many observant Jews, went into business. That way he could make his own hours and set aside time for Divine service. He was a fairly successful businessman who worked hard and was known to be honest.

Unfortunately, he made some investments that failed, even though they were perfectly aboveboard and should have made money. And Reb Avraham didn't only lose his own money in the crash; vast sums of borrowed money were also lost.

Since everyone knew it was not Reb Avraham's fault, the investors gave up on ever seeing a penny of their money. Reb Avraham was known to be exceedingly upright, though, and after some time he found other investors and continued doing business.

He was successful again, and like many others who had gone bankrupt, he slowly rebuilt his capital.

Reb Avraham's first set of investors were surprised several years later when he asked for a repayment plan for the vast sum of money that he owed.

When people expressed their admiration, he would say, "I am a Breslover. Rebbe Nachman taught that one must be absolutely honest in financial matters. Even though they didn't expect to be repaid, I felt that as a Breslover, it wouldn't be correct to renege on even one penny that I borrowed."

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VII:174

SIDEPATH

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

221. Many almanacs, both Jewish and otherwise, claim to predict the weather. The Rebbe ridiculed them as having no relation to reality. He said, "If they really know, let them predict the different types of weather that occur on a single day."



There are many kinds of weather each day. One day may bring cold and heat, rain and snow, wind and calm, and countless other variations. Who can predict and know all this? Therefore it is written, "How great are Your deeds, O God, exceedingly deep are Your thoughts. A brutish man does not know; a fool does not understand this" (Psalms 92:6-7).

Only a fool would claim to know with outside wisdom the changes that take place each day.

222. I heard that the Rebbe once encouraged a man who was greatly confused about his beliefs. The Rebbe told him, "It is written that all creation came into being only because of people like you. God saw that there would be people who would cling to our holy faith, despite suffering greatly because of the confusion and doubts that constantly plague them. He perceived that they would overcome these doubts and strengthen themselves in their beliefs. It was because of this that God brought forth all creation."

This man was then greatly strengthened and unperturbed whenever he had these confusing thoughts.



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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.