

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The One and Only You

By Yossi Katz

REBBE NACHMAN TOLD a story:

The Simpleton had learned the trade of a shoemaker. Since he was simple, he had to study very much to master it, and even then he was not very expert in the craft. He got married and earned a living from his work. However, he was simple and not an expert in his craft, so his livelihood was very meager and limited ... Throughout this, he was always very happy. He was filled with joy at all times.

Since he had not completely mastered his trade, when he finished a shoe, it was usually triangular in shape. But he would take the shoe in his hand and speak very highly of it, deriving much enjoyment from his handiwork. He would say, "My wife, what a beautiful, wonderful shoe this is! How sweet this shoe is! This shoe is as sweet as honey and sugar!"

Sometimes she would answer him, "If that's true, why can other shoemakers get three gulden for a pair of shoes, while you only get a gulden and a half?" He would then answer, "What do I care about that? That is their work, and this is my work!" "Why must we speak about others?" [He would continue,] "Let's think about how much clear profit I make on this shoe. The leather costs so much, the glue and thread ... so much, and the other things so much. I also have to pay a certain amount for the tongues. Therefore, I have a clear profit of ten groschen. As long as I make such a clear profit, what do I care?" He was thus always filled with joy and happiness. (Rabbi Nachman's Stories #9, "The Sophisticate and the Simpleton")

One of the greatest challenges we face is our lack of self-worth and faith in our own individuality. We so often confuse appreciating someone else's uniqueness or positive qualities with jealousy. We mistakenly think we are doing something constructive by observing special qualities in others, while in fact we are just feeling bad about our own inability to emulate them.

But by observing the Simpleton in Rebbe Nachman's story,

we can see life differently. We should stop looking to others and begin looking within ourselves. If God takes pleasure in my imperfect work, if He appreciates my efforts in spite of my own unique circumstances, should I not feel tremendous inner joy? Yes, the shoemaker couldn't make the perfect shoe, but he was able to make a fair and honest living. To him, that was all that mattered. Therefore he was able to rise above what society thought of him, and completely disregard their opinions. "That is their work, and this is my work!" he so eloquently pronounces.

This is true not only about earning a living but also about our service of God. Perhaps I was not able to pray as sincerely as the guy next to me in shul, or be the perfect parent like my next-door neighbor. Nevertheless, I do try, and even if I only produce a "three-corner shoe," a three-corner shoe also has value.

The Torah commands us regarding counting the Omer, "And you shall count *for yourselves*" (Leviticus 23:15). This implies that in order to count properly, begin by counting yourself. I am a unique person who was raised in a distinctive home and experienced unique circumstances. There is no one like me. It is impossible for me to compare myself with others; I have nothing in common with them. Having faith in myself is no less important than having faith in God.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Pesach 9

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person can always direct his thoughts as he chooses, since it is impossible to think two thoughts at once. (Letter #284)

Walking in Faith

PEOPLE WHO KNEW R' Yitzchok Breiter (1886-1943?) described his magnetic effect on people. He had a magical power of speech, and his words went directly into the hearts of all who came in contact with him.

Yet despite his penetrating wisdom, he conducted himself with the utmost simplicity in his studies and devotions. He spent much time in *hitbodedut* (secluded meditation and prayer), gathering a circle around him who never let a day go by without this practice. With all R' Yitzchok's breadth of Torah learning, his profound knowledge of Breslov literature, and his capacity to arouse and fire his followers, he never presented himself as anything other than their friend and equal, and they knew him simply as Yitzchok.

The intensity of R' Yitzchok's faith and trust in God was summed up by R' Avraham b'Reb Nachman (1849-1918), leader of the Breslover Chassidim in Uman: "R' Yitzchok walks in faith like someone walking through a most amazing garden."

It once happened that R' Yitzchok was arrested by the Polish authorities on trumped-up charges, together with a neighbor. In the anti-Semitic climate in Poland, such arrests were not infrequent. As they were being taken into custody, their hands were chained. R' Yitzchok saw that his neighbor was depressed. "Why are you sad?" he asked. "Imagine if they bedecked you with chains of gold. Would that be a reason to get depressed?"

R' Yitzchok was sentenced to five years in prison. When he heard the verdict, he rose to his feet and joyously made the blessing over bad tidings: "Blessed are You ... the True Judge." In the prison, the authorities wanted to shave off all the prisoners' beards. R' Yitzchok prayed fervently to God not to let them touch his beard. Just as the prison barber was finishing the prisoner before R' Yitzchok, the razor broke and he was unable to continue. Within a few days, the Russians occupied that part of Poland and released all the prisoners.

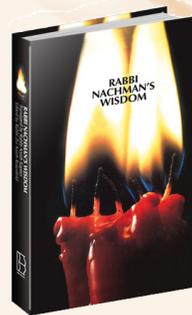
In World War II, when the Nazi persecutors overran Poland, R' Yitzchok was one of the leading figures in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the early 1940s he was deported to the Treblinka concentration camp, and there he lost his life in the gas chamber in sanctification of the Name of God.

From the Introduction to "Seven Pillars of Faith"

SIDEPATH

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

227. It is best to seclude yourself and meditate in the meadows outside the city. Go to a grassy field, for the grass will awaken your heart.



228. The Rebbe once said: There are certainly many religious people who do not seclude themselves with God. But I call them *fleitis* (confused and confounded). When the Mashiach suddenly comes and calls them, they will be baffled. When a man wakes up from a restful sleep, his mind is calm and relaxed. This is how we will be when the Mashiach comes – totally without panic or confusion.

229. The Rebbe once spoke to a youth and encouraged him to seclude himself and converse with God in his native language. ... Make a habit of praying before God from the depths of your heart. Use whatever language you know best. Ask God to make you worthy of truly serving Him. This is the essence of prayer.

230. R' Naftali told me that he heard the Rebbe say, "A Jewish heart should be drawn to God so strongly that every heartbeat is a flame yearning for God." The Rebbe gestured with his hands to express this great yearning.

He said, "Even when you sit among others, you can lift your hands along with your heart and cry out to God with a yearning soul." The Rebbe then lifted his hands with great emotion, and with wonderful yearning recited the verse, "Do not forsake me, O Lord my God" (Psalms 38:22).



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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.