

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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“Fear” No Evil

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF THE most misunderstood and potentially harmful emotions is fear of God. Like everything else in the world, fear is not some unfortunate feeling, but a creation of God. The opening word of Creation, *BeReiShYT* (In the beginning) (Genesis 1:1) is an acronym for *YaREi BoSheT* (fear-humility). The purpose of Creation, says the *Zohar*, is for man to humble himself and appreciate God’s awesomeness by means of fear.

But when many people think of fear of God, they conjure up a vision of dark angels smacking the living daylight out of them for some misdoing. That idea is simply misplaced. True, there is punishment in store for our misdeeds; however, the punishment itself is a cleansing process for the soul and essential for our eternal life. Fear is a reminder that God has created us for a specific purpose – it’s a wakeup call to stay focused on the task at hand in order to achieve greatness.

I recently read the account of a popular Rabbi’s journey to becoming a Breslover. He describes growing up in the house of a great Tzaddik and always wanting to thrive and grow, but he was stunted by personal shortcomings. His thirst for spiritual accomplishment was so great that, at one point, he contemplated suicide. Fortunately, he came across a letter that Reb Noson had written to his own son, Reb Yitzchok:

Pay no attention to any feelings of discouragement, and do not listen to the criticism of the Evil One and the Other Side who give reproof only in order to dishearten you and distance you from that little bit of good that you are trying to hold on to. ... A person must listen to criticism and rebuke only if it draws him closer, not if it pushes him away. I have often spoken to you about the intention of

the mussar literature that so harshly rebukes and belittles the reader. It is not trying to distance a person from God, but seeks to draw him closer. ...

A person’s every thought, word and deed has two aspects and can be an elixir of life or a deadly poison. ... You must be very careful, because much of the time [the Evil One] takes the words of the Living God and turns them upside-down and actually tries to repel and dishearten a person with them, God forbid (Alim LiTerufah, Letter #27).

This can also be seen in our *parashah*. All the miracles and wonders that God performed in Egypt were meant to demonstrate to the world that He is in charge. Pharaoh, however, refused to recognize God. God responded by saying, “But regarding you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear God” (Exodus 9:30). When Pharaoh finally did allow the Jewish people to leave, he pursued them to the Sea of Reeds, where God sent him to his untimely end.

The Jewish people witnessed these same awesome miracles and had a completely different reaction: “Israel saw the tremendous power that God wielded against Egypt, and the people feared God” (ibid., 14:31).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the whole world is a very narrow bridge – but the main thing is not to make oneself afraid at all. We each experience scares in life and often live with much fear and anxiety. It is within our reach to transfer those negative feelings to a place of faith and recognition of God’s sovereignty. When we live with the constant recognition that God is in charge and that whatever He does is for our best, we are able to elevate our fears, transforming them into a positive life of purpose and meaning. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Bekhor Beheimah
Tehorah 4:3*

New Realities

By Yehudis Golshevsky

EIGHT YEARS AFTER Rebbe Nachman passed away, Reb Noson lost all his money. He had been raised with means and had married into a prominent, well-to-do family. The transition from a life of abundance to a life of poverty in the Ukraine was difficult to bear. Every time his family needed money, he sold another cherished object. Eventually he had to sell off his set of metal silverware – a valuable commodity in those years – and replace it with a simple wooden set.

Reb Noson recounted how hard it was for him to adjust to his new reality of eating off coarse wooden cutlery like the meanest of peasants. “At first I literally did not taste my food due to the new, strange texture of the utensils. It took me a few weeks until I adjusted and could savor food the way I always had,” he said.

Yet despite his challenges, Reb Noson was just as diligent in his Divine service as he had always been.

* * *

R' Mordechai Kanelsky of Kremenchug was a fairly unusual phenomenon among the circle of Breslover Chassidim – he was a very wealthy man. R' Motyeh, as he was known, donated generously to the many poor Breslovers in Uman and its environs. He would provide certain serious spiritual seekers with wood and a sack of flour, enough for their minimal needs for the entire winter.

Once when R' Motyeh was in Uman, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender noticed that the usually effusive man seemed upset. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Every time I visited Uman in the past, I gave wood and flour to as many worthy people as I could,” R' Motyeh told him. “Unfortunately, I recently lost all my assets and now I can’t afford to give more than a minuscule amount of assistance.”

“Don’t be disturbed,” Rabbi Levi Yitzchok comforted him. “God gave you the famously difficult test of affluence and you did very well. Now He is testing you with poverty. He wants to see if you will strengthen yourself and be happy despite your changed circumstances, or if you will fall into depression and sadness. Here is your chance to shine in your new reality!”

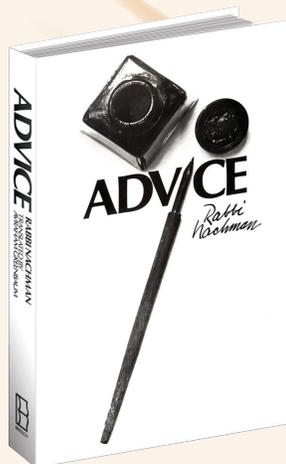
R' Motyeh later recalled how comforted these words made him feel.

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:268, IV:597

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

SPEECH. 4. Words that are neither listened to nor accepted cannot be called “speech” at all. The way to discover the true meaning of the gift of speech is through speaking the praises of the Tzaddikim. This is the complete *tikkun* (rectification) for speech (*Likutey Moharan I*, 29:1-2).



5. Speech is the vessel with which we receive the flow of blessings. According to the words, so is the blessing. One who attains perfection in the way he speaks can receive abundant blessings by means of the vessels formed by his words. This is the reason why, when we pray, we must actually

pronounce the words with our lips (*ibid.* I, 34:3).

6. Speech is the breath of the lips of the Holy One. To abuse it is to make it into a wild blast, the “raging storm-wind” (Psalms 148:8). This “raging storm-wind” is the “Great Accuser” – the source of all the trials and challenges that confront man. This wild spirit wastes away man’s very flesh. It is the root of all the slander and falsehood and evil that people speak about each other. It is called the “end of all flesh” (Genesis 6:13) because it works for the destruction of man’s flesh and life. All this comes from abusing the faculty of speech (*Likutey Moharan I*, 38:2).



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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.