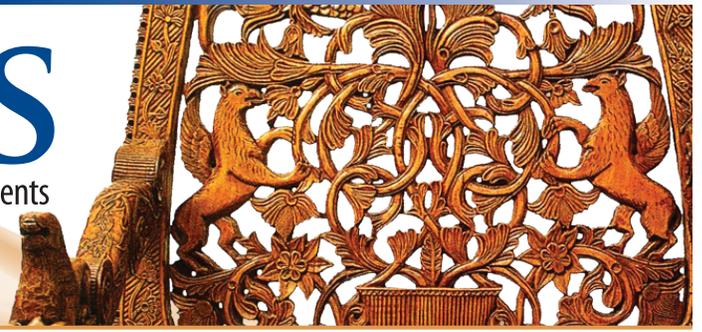


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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I'm Not a Robot!

By Yossi Katz

LAST NIGHT I read a news report so upsetting, it weighed heavily on my mind the entire night. People have opposing opinions regarding current events, and it's probably better for me to leave the story out, but suffice it to say that we live at a time when good and evil are confused and compassion is often abused in the cruelest ways. This is not only true on the international stage and in the political arena, but applies equally in our everyday lives and experiences.

Take, for example, society's glorification of the pursuit of money and personal wealth. Nowadays, accumulating wealth is often seen as a religious obligation. "Heaven forbid" if someone chooses to live a simple, minimalistic lifestyle – he must be either a hippie or a loser. I once traveled upstate to visit a friend whose chairs and cups were all unmatched. There was a beauty in the simplicity of his lifestyle and his valuing something for its practical use rather than aesthetic appeal.

By spending even a little time browsing the web, one is bombarded with advertisements and media exploiting physical beauty, food and so many other things that are sacred and meant to be earned and cherished. It is as if we are being programmed that our every bodily desire is to be respected and sanctified. Society seems to be transforming into one big race for physical gratification.

As good Jews, we should be revolted by this perversion of truth, decency and human dignity. But our frequent exposure to these lies slowly dulls our conscience. Nevertheless, every so often we witness something so shocking that even we are awakened and begin to contemplate the ultimate truth. Perhaps such an experience is the news of the current barbaric murders in Israel, and the media's false representation of self-defense and basic survival. So, what are we to do? How can truth and spirituality prosper in such a vile and corrupt society?

Many years ago, there lived a different corrupt society. Born less than 300 years after the Flood, Abraham's generation was already challenging the very existence of God. Yet Abraham, who had grown up in the house of the chief idolater and idol salesman, was able to shake off the influence of the entire world and grow spiritually, becoming the first patriarch of God's People. How did he do it?

God commanded Abraham, "*Lekh lekha* — Go to yourself" (Genesis 12:1). Abraham was taught to focus on only one place: the Divine spark within himself. Eternal truth lies within. No matter what society may profess, we must learn to seek the truth within ourselves and discover our unique identity.

The verse goes on to list the influences that Abraham had to overcome to realize his individuality. "From your land" – this includes society's false attitudes and opinions. "From your birthplace" – this includes the problematic character traits and tendencies that we are born with. "From your father's house" – this includes the negative education and attitudes we may have picked up at home.

We each possess a unique soul; however, we cannot unlock its potential until we first separate ourselves and seek our individual truth, good qualities and spiritual path. Copying others, even religious and pious individuals, is detrimental to this process. Yes, we can appreciate them and all of the goodness around us, but ultimately we must seek the truth from within. We can begin by conversing with God and sharing words of sincere honesty wherever we find ourselves. By accustoming ourselves to constantly seek the truth – no matter how crude and uncharming it may seem, we can discover who we truly are and ultimately reach incredible spiritual greatness.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geneivah 5, 7-8

Simple Acts

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN ALWAYS taught his students that their main focus in prayer should be on the straightforward meaning of the words. Even those who studied Kabbalah were discouraged from veering from the plain meaning of the prayers during the act of prayer itself.

When asked by an advanced student what particular meditation he should have in mind when saying a particular Divine Name, Rebbe Nachman wondered aloud, “‘God’ is not enough for you?”

This was Rebbe Nachman’s approach to prayer, and also to mitzvot in general. To act with directness and simplicity, to pray and carry out mitzvot purely as a means of fulfilling God’s will.

When Rebbe Nachman was a young child and found himself gifted with a coin, he would hurry to change it into smaller coins, into pennies. He would then steal into the synagogue—sometimes even through the window—so that no one would see him. Quietly and stealthily, he would take out a *Shaarey Tzion* prayerbook, which included all kinds of additional prayers and supplications for different times and events, and very sweetly recite the *LeShem Yichud* prayer that is said by some prior to performing a mitzvah. Making sure he was not being observed, he would then sidle over to the charity box and deposit one penny.

As soon as he had dropped the coin into the box, he immediately went back to his *Shaarey Tzion* prayerbook, recited the *LeShem Yichud*, and went to give another penny to charity. He did this again and again, with no less enthusiasm each time, until every single coin had found its way into the charity box.

Rebbe Nachman knew the value of every mitzvah-act, and he took this outlook with him as he grew: to invest in the simple acts, and to do as many of them as possible.

Similarly, Rebbe Nachman encouraged his students to sing all of the Shabbat songs at the meals “like simple Jews do,” and not to feel that it was somehow a waste of time that could be better spent some other way. “Singing all of the Shabbat songs saves one’s children from following the path away from Yiddishkeit! We sing from the simple joy of being Jewish!”

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 115-117

SIDEPATH

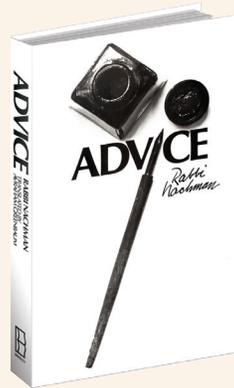
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

PERCEPTIONS OF GODLINESS. 12. When one attains a certain perception of Godliness, he must be careful to observe certain limits: he must “contract” the experience, as it were, in the sense of putting certain limits on the way he explores and follows through his perception. Even in the realms of holiness, there are places where it is forbidden to travel (*Likutey Moharan II, 5:7*).

13. King David said, “For I know that God is great, our God above all others” (Psalms 135:5). These are King David’s words. “I know” – I alone, for the vision of God’s greatness cannot be shared (*Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom #1*).

14. You may have a vision, but even with yourself you cannot share it. Today, you may be inspired and see a new light. But tomorrow, you will no longer be able to communicate it, even to yourself (*ibid.*).

15. Each person has only his own perceptions to go by. The more advanced his perceptions, the more he can understand just a bit how ignorant he really is. ... The Rebbe had remarkable things to say about this subject, and he showed how a person can always fortify himself so as never to lose hope. Regardless of where he may have fallen, he should never despair of crying out to God. In His greatness, God has the power to turn everything to good (*ibid. #3*).



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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.