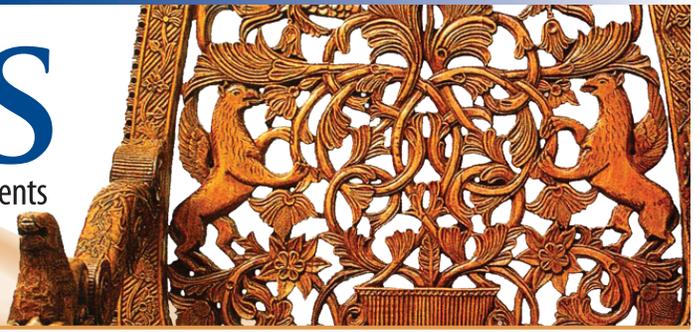


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Missing Link

By Yossi Katz

“**IN THE PLACE** where returnees to Judaism stand, even completely righteous tzaddikim cannot stand” (*Berakhot* 34b).

Wow! Our Rabbis are implying that the returnee is greater than the tzaddik. But shouldn't one who has spent his entire life in the service of God, and never really faltered, be considered supreme in every aspect? How could there be a “place” reserved for one who has erred?

This question is as old as the universe. You see, once there was only Oneness: only God existed. But God wanted to create a world where others would know Him and develop the deepest kinship with Him. Because He wanted us to appreciate and experience His ultimate kindness and greatness, He created our universe.

But there was a problem. If we were to immediately recognize everything created as an obvious manifestation of Godliness, the world would automatically revert to its original state – we would be nullified in God's awesomeness. Therefore God created freedom of choice and its many forms of multiplicity. By being able to experience the opposites of pure holiness, including our doubts and lusts, we have the space to develop our own identities while at the same time uplift and connect our every experience with God's absolute unity.

This is life. God created an incomplete world, but He gave us the power to complete His creation. When we see through the “thick of things” and believe that everything comes from Him, we are able to reunite creation with its Source. Whenever we study Torah, pray or do a mitzvah, we express our faith in the unity of creation and reconnect ourselves in the highest way.

For someone who has lived a completely righteous life, there isn't that great a distinction between God's Oneness and creation. Such a person has more or less lived his life always connected to God, and is therefore, in a sense, living in the original, nullified state that God was not content with. On the other hand, the person who has done wrong and forgotten about God best expresses the purpose of Creation. When that person returns, he exemplifies God's purpose: to create a distinct being who achieves complete connection and unity with his Creator. The further removed we are from God, the greater is our capacity to experience and reflect the awesome Oneness of God. By being strong and believing in God when He feels distant, we are fulfilling the purpose of Creation to the ultimate degree – we are completing God's creation!

The Jewish people lived a miraculous lifestyle in the desert for 40 years. Living with such an obvious level of direct manifestation of Godliness, they were expected to enter the Holy Land, the land of Divine Providence, with faith alone. Any challenge they encountered would ultimately serve to bring about God's will. But instead, they resorted to the logical plan of sending spies to “check out” the Land – they made their own “creation.” Their newly-created burden and challenge of finding God in the multiplicity of things was now entrusted with the spies – and, unfortunately, the spies did not live up to this challenge.

Each of us is an agent of God Himself. We have been entrusted with life and have been asked to carry out God's will by connecting to Him in every situation. True, it would have been easier had we always made the right choices and lived on the level of the Jews in the desert. But even if we have erred, with our faith, we have the awesome power to complete God's creation!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 3

The Advice-Giver

REB SHIMSHON BARSKI (1873-1935) was a member of the last generation of Breslovers that lived in Uman before World War II. A great-great-grandchild of Rebbe Nachman, Reb Shimshon was known for being well thought out, calm and composed, an excellent public speaker, and a true servant of God.

In the Breslov synagogue in Uman, he would stand by the window overlooking the cemetery where Rebbe Nachman was buried, praying word by word. Those who saw his prayers described them as “honey” and “sweet water” (a Kabbalistic term denoting pure prayer coming from a pure soul). In contrast to his contemporaries—other leading Breslovers in Uman whose prayers were loud and thunderous—Reb Shimshon’s prayers were “as quiet as poured oil”—polite, genteel, and drenched in tears.

Reb Shimshon’s entire approach to Judaism was unpressured, unhurried, dignified and patient, as one would expect from a descendant of Rebbe Nachman. He didn’t waste words, always speaking to the point. He spoke softly, but with directives that were consistent, clear, and left no room for uncertainty. Yet he didn’t “tie the ropes of connection” so tightly that they choked the spirit of those who sought his advice.

Indeed, many sought his advice, and Reb Shimshon influenced Breslovers far and wide. He asked those who wrote to him to tell him about their spiritual life. He would ask each one if he had a partner for studying Rebbe Nachman’s teachings and a regular Torah study program. He showed special concern for converts to Judaism who had become Breslovers.

Reb Shimshon avoided controversy and advised others to do the same. For example, when people wanted to remove someone from the Breslov shul due to his overenthusiastic praying, Reb Shimshon said, “Believe me. He disturbs me, too, with his clapping and shouting. But I’m afraid to say anything to him—maybe he’s sincere.”

When the Communists rounded up the Breslovers in Uman in 1919, Reb Shimshon kept their spirits up and his wits about him. When people questioned a suggestion he gave them, he often commented, “I’m not spouting this from a book as others might. I’m telling you this from my personal experience. The only thing that kept me going through all I’ve suffered is Rebbe Nachman’s advice.”

From “A Bit More Advice”

Dedicated in the Memory of (L’ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon

SIDEPATH

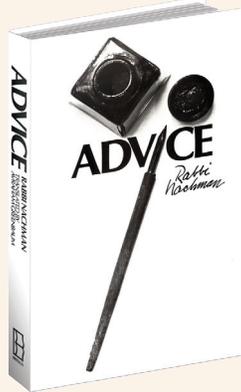
Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

HONOR. 13. When some new honor comes to a person, it is something to be quite apprehensive about. At times honor is sent to a person as a prelude to his soul being taken. Therefore a person should always be careful to receive any honor in great holiness and only for the sake of God, not for his own benefit or enjoyment (Likutey Moharan I, 67:1).

14. Usually, however, the honor comes for good. For when a new soul comes to a man, it is clothed in honor. Thus, when a person receives the honor as he should, he is able to receive the new soul that is clothed in it (ibid.).

15. A greedy appetite is a blot on the honor of God. Then God hides His face, and the world comes under the shadow of His harsh severity. Glory falls to the arrogant, who abrogate all the dignity to themselves. Power, kingship, authority and honor fall into the hands of the heathens, the wicked and the insolent, and when a situation arises where the Jewish people need to take some firm action to ensure the survival of our holy faith, it is necessary to have recourse to their strength.

But when we break the lust for food, the honor of God is vindicated and the insolent are left without power, authority or dignity. God’s countenance radiates to the world and the harsh judgments are broken (ibid. I, 67:3).



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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.