

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Living with Ratzon

By Ozer Bergman

We are now preparing to receive the Torah anew on Shavuot. Fill in the blank: The most necessary “thing” I need to be a better Jew is ____.

If you said *ratzon* (interest, desire, wanting), you’re correct. Rebbe Nachman teaches that it’s an absolute necessity for a Jew to train himself to be in a state of anticipation for God, His Torah and mitzvahs. A Jew needs to make every effort to constantly want that which is good and sacred.

To paraphrase Rebbe Nachman: “No one can say he serves God, not even the highest angel. We all fall short in practice. But everyone can *want* to be a good Jew. Yet there is a great deal of difference between the honesty and intensity of desire that people have. Not only that—even the same person has varying degrees of desire to be a good Jew, from one day to the next. It’s critical that you develop an honest interest and desire to be a good Jew.”

Ratzon has another meaning: will. Reb Noson explains that God’s will, what God wants from humankind, is that we believe that everything—everything—happens solely because it is God’s will. Reb Noson explains how God’s *ratzon* for us and our *ratzon* for God are mutually dependent:

“Someone who genuinely believes that everything happens solely because it is God’s will, will certainly desire God and to worship God. This is so even if he occasionally falls from his level of practice and even if he actually violates the Torah’s laws, God forbid. As long as he has complete faith in God, and truly believes that nothing happens unless God wants it to happen, he will certainly have a strong desire to serve God.

“Though a person may take all this and more to heart, it may happen that he still cannot overcome his lust. However, that does not discount or nullify his desire for God. Why? Because he believes in God’s will, that everything happens because God wills it to happen and that God will repay him, and every person, for what he has done. Who would be so foolish as to not desire to return to God, to be saved from Hell and worse, when he could merit eternal life?

“Thus, we find that by believing in God and that everything happens solely because of His will, one’s desire to be an ever-improving Jew will be strong even if he does not successfully

convert this into practice, and even if he sins.” (Eventually, if his *ratzon* is honest, he will be more successful in living the Torah.)

So it starts with *ratzon*—your desire to be a good Jew—and it ends with *ratzon*, living in the moment-to-moment experience that all of (your) life is God’s will. But that ending is not something you can get on your own. That, writes Reb Noson, can only be had “via unity, love and peace, that all Jews join together in love and harmony.”

Reb Noson explains that each aspect of *ratzon* is a guarantor for the other. That is, each is improved by the other and only in conjunction with the other. Similarly, we Jews can only receive the Torah (i.e., more truly live by it as time goes by) if each Jew serves as a guarantor for every other Jew. What does it take to be a guarantor for each of my fellow Jews? Let me spell it out for you. It calls for a great deal of care, respect and love!

Reb Noson notes the question: How can I guarantee that someone else will properly keep the Torah if I can’t keep it myself? How can I pay his “loan” if I can’t pay mine? He answers that there is simply no way around it. Receiving the Torah demands unity and oneness, within and with others. When we Jews use our innate wholeness and unite to live by the Torah, with the belief that everything that happens is God’s will, we are as one.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Areiv 3:30

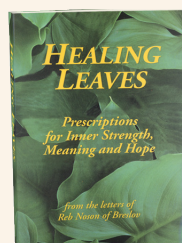
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

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HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



You can accomplish anything through desire and yearning. Accustom yourself to speak the words of your desires. Wake up! Rise and stir the good in your heart to articulate your yearnings and desires in personal prayer! Accustom yourself to yearn and to ache with longing for God – at all times – and to bring these desires to your lips. (*Letter #64*)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Translated & compiled by Chaim Kramer

Parashat Bechukotai delivers the dire ramifications of spurning God and the Torah. While Parashat Bechukotai's terrible curses frighten people, Reb Noson shows that the curses actually contain the cure.

“But if you do not listen to Me and do not perform all these commandments” (Leviticus 26:14).

“Why was the Land lost [to the Jews]?” This question was asked to the wise men and the prophets; they could not answer it until God Himself explained, “Because they abandoned My Torah that I gave them, and they did not listen to My Voice or walk in [My paths]” (Jeremiah 9:11-12).

How can we prevent this from happening again?

“They did not listen to My Voice or walk in [My paths]”—these are one and the same concept. Rabbi Yehudah said, “They did not recite the blessings over the Torah before studying it” (*Nedarim* 81a; *Bava Metzia* 85a-b).

Wasn't it obvious that the Temple was destroyed and the nation exiled because the Jews had sinned? Why did that answer elude the wise men and prophets? And is the reason given by the Talmud – that they neglected to recite the blessings over the Torah – so grave an error that it would result in such a terrible punishment?

In fact, God's answer was not meant to be a reason for the exile, but a catalyst to prevent future upheaval: “How can we prevent this from happening again?”

God hinted at the answer by saying, “They did not listen to My Voice or walk in [My paths].” A Jew must study God's laws every single day. No matter what sins or misdeeds he has done, he must try to grab whatever good he can, be it a page of Torah or even a single law. That way, his desire to serve God will eventually lead him to reattach himself to God. Because the Jews did not try to grab whatever bit of Torah and *mitzvot* that they could, they distanced themselves from God even more.

The blessings over the Torah aid us in our quest for Godliness. These blessings cite the beauty and the pleasantness of the Torah which attract us to its study and fill our lives with joy. By neglecting to recite the blessings, the Jews detached themselves from their awareness of the fulfillment of those blessings—i.e., Torah study—causing their downfall (*Likutey Halakhot* VIII, p. 73a-73b).

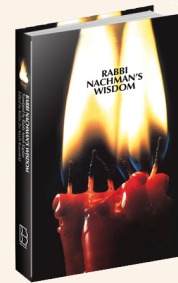
SIDEPATH

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

28. Attempt to go through all of our sacred books in the course of your lifetime. You will have then visited every place in the Torah.

The very rich travel constantly from land to land. They spend huge amounts just so they will be able to boast that they have been to some faraway place.

Likewise, while still in this world, you should travel to every location in the Torah. In the future life, you will then be able to boast that you have visited every place in our sacred literature. At that time, you will also remember everything you have ever learned.



29. The Rebbe constantly stressed for us the importance of studying the codes of religious law. He emphasized this more than any other study.

The Rebbe said that everyone must study the codes each day, without fail.

If you are under duress and have no time, you may study any law in the *Shulchan Arukh*, even if it does not follow your regular course of study.

You should go through at least one law every day of your life. Under normal circumstances, you should have a fixed practice of studying the *Shulchan Arukh* in order, a given amount each day. Continue until all four sections are completed and then start again at the beginning. Continue this way all the days of your life.



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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.