

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Searching for Answers

By Yossi Katz

WE ARE IN PAIN. We are in sorrow. The Jewish People is connected – we are truly one. Because of this, we each personally feel the horrifying loss of our three dear and precious brothers.

When describing this month of Tammuz, Rebbe Nachman teaches, “The first letters of ‘*Zikhru Torat Moshe* (remember Moshe’s Torah)’ (Malachi 3:22) spell *TaMmuZ* without the *vav*. This is because in the month of Tammuz we must elicit mindfulness in order to rectify forgetfulness. For it was then that forgetfulness came into existence, as a result of the Tablets being broken in Tammuz. [The *vav* represents the Tablets, which are described as measuring 6 by 6 handbreadths.] As our Sages teach, ‘Had the First Tablets not been shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from the Jews’” (*Eruvin* 54a; *Likutey Moharan* I, 217).

God Himself engraved the Ten Commandments – the Torah that was to be given in Tammuz was so exalted that it was to be engraved in our hearts and minds forever. Had we been able to wait just a little bit longer for Moshe to come down the mountain with the Tablets, we would have received a Torah that connected us to God in an unbreakable way. But instead, the Tablets were shattered and forgetfulness descended upon our nation.

Now we feel far, we feel distant. Things happen and we lack any sense of clarity in understanding them. This is all part of forgetfulness. True, we do have the Torah, but it doesn’t always speak to us; often we have a hard time finding the answers when we study it. So how do we connect? How do we deal with tragedy and pain?

In this week’s *parashah*, Bilam describes us as “a people that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). The word “alone” in Hebrew is *BaDaD*, as in *hitBoDeDut*. Bilam was revealing an essential method for our survival and eventual triumph: we must seclude ourselves in conversation with our Creator.

Although many great Tzaddikim spoke about the importance of *hitbodedut*, it was only Rebbe Nachman

who recommended speaking to God as if He were a true, close friend. When a son speaks to his father, he always feels a certain level of reservation and awe of authority. Not so when one speaks to a good friend – then he is free to pour out his whole heart and express all his emotions and deepest thoughts.

The way we can not only survive life, but live life, is by fortifying ourselves in private conversation with God. Every bit of pain we feel, every lack, can be transformed into a prayer. Every experience can be used as an opportunity to come closer. True, there will still be many things that we might never understand in this world. But we can turn to God and share the burden with Him. We can better understand ourselves and reach clarity. And we can fill our lives with hope by praying for a better future.

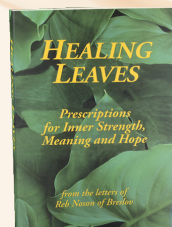
If we try to find meaning and hope during difficult times, instead of using those times as an excuse to harm ourselves and our relationship with God and others, then, Bilam continues, “Who can count the dust of Jacob?” (*ibid.*, 23:10). Who can count and ascertain the preciousness of each Jew, for every step he takes will be toward serving God? Every step will effect incredible *tikkunim* and give immeasurable *nachas* to God. May we be mindful of the forgetfulness and sorrow of this month and, through our *hitbodedut*, build an everlasting relationship with God. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5:85
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



We must elevate all our worries and anxieties, so that we fear nothing but God. We should know and believe that all the anxiety and fears that come upon us, especially those we are experiencing right now, are meant to remind us to fear God. (*Letter #198*)

“Take a Rendel”

By Yehudis Golshevsky

TWO BUSINESS PARTNERS worked hard to make it in the world. Eventually they separated, but remained good friends. One partner went on to great success and grew very wealthy. His former partner, though, lost everything. Lacking prospects, he decided to approach his old partner for help.

The wealthy man's compassion was aroused and he graciously agreed to support his old friend. They went on this way for years; sometimes the poor man could make ends meet, but often he needed help. His wealthy friend was always generous and caring.

Eventually the poor man got back on his feet and found a good investment. It succeeded, and he began to build his capital. Everything he turned his hand to was a success, and he began to feel a bit full of himself. Curiously, at around the same time, his wealthy former partner lost all his money. Naturally, the latter approached his newly wealthy friend – the man he had supported for so many years. To his shock, his old friend didn't want to know him. Not only wouldn't he give him a penny, he wasn't even willing to grant an audience to such a downtrodden person! The formerly wealthy partner was infuriated, and burned with resentment for years.

A decade later, their fortunes reversed again. Now the wealthy partner who had fallen was wealthy again, and the arrogant man who had risen from nothing was destitute. To the shock of the man whose wealth was restored, the poor man he had once supported and who had treated him so meanly actually came to his house for help!

“I will have him thrown out,” muttered the man whose generosity had been so badly served.

But then he stopped himself. He walked into the room where his ex-partner anxiously waited and, with superhuman effort, smiled and threw him a valuable coin. “Here, take a rendel,” he said.

After a long life, the wealthy man passed away. It was time for him to be judged on high. His many flaws and failures appeared as accusing angels. Just then a voice called out, “Here, take a rendel.” And all the accusing angels dispersed.

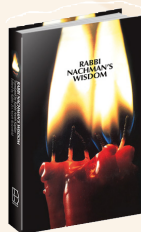
After telling this story, Reb Levi Yitzchok Bender added, “Rebbe Nachman said, ‘The main point of our Jewishness is to overturn anger to mercy.’”

Based on Noam Siach III, pp. 24-27

SIDEPATH

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

135. The Rebbe once spoke to a man who was very far from God. He told him that he could help himself by sighing and groaning about his situation. The Rebbe then revealed a lesson on the verse, “There is an emptiness (*hevel*) to what is done on the earth” (Ecclesiastes 8:14). *Hevel* also means breath or exhalation.



When you sigh and groan with desire to return to God, this exhalation (*HeVeL*) breaks the rope (*cheVeL*) of spiritual impurity that binds you and holds you back. You can then be bound up with the holy.

136. The main thing is to nullify every one of your personality traits. You must strive to do so until you have totally obliterated your ego, rendering it into absolute nothingness before God. Begin with one trait and annihilate it completely. Then work on your other traits, one at a time, until they are totally nonexistent. As you annihilate your ego, God's glory will begin to shine through and be revealed.

God's glory is like light. When you are bound to an emotion or desire, it obstructs God's glory and casts a shadow. God's light is then hidden from you. But as you nullify these emotions and desires, you also remove this shadow. And as the shadow departs, the light of God's glory is revealed. When a person is worthy of annihilating the shadow completely and making it into absolute nothingness, then God's glory is revealed to all the earth.



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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.