

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT PINCHAS • 5774 • VOL. 4 NO. 39

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## Recapture the Flag!

By Yossi Katz

**THE JEWISH PEOPLE** have never lacked enemies. Just as we are attacked today by terrorists, so too, in the days of Moses, our enemies constantly schemed and planned our destruction. However, in the days of Moses, our nation was one worthy of prophecy – ours was a nation that witnessed the Ten Plagues in Egypt and the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Because of our elevated spiritual status, our enemies were not brazen enough to attack us in a conventional way, but were cunning enough to realize that they must threaten the spiritual core of our people.

“The God of the Jews despises *zima* (immorality)” (*Sanhedrin* 106a). The Midianites were intelligent. They understood that the trademark of the Jew – *brit milah* – demonstrates the holy nature of our people. We are a people who cherish life, who use our sensual desires to promote family life. Sensuality is the strongest drive we possess; by focusing this in a kosher and dignified way, we sanctify our greatest passion before God. This area of holiness is our spiritual battlefield.

The Midianites, like most of our enemies, had little self-regard for their own. They sent out their daughters as harlots to seduce Jewish men. Zimri ben Salu, one of the princes of the Tribe of Simeon, was discovered together with the king's daughter, Kozbi. The Midianites' hatred was so great that they were willing to use the king's daughter to entrap us!

We were deeply wounded in battle; the enemy captured our flag. But God never abandons us. When we left the spiritual waste pit of Egypt, we were counted. After the sin of the golden calf, we were counted. Now, too, God commanded Moses, “Take a head-count of the entire assembly of Israel ... all of those who go out to the army of Israel.” God was teaching us how to be inducted into the army of Israel and how to reclaim our spirit: We must count every single Jew, we must find what makes each one of us special.

By reading the Torah, we could mistakenly think that our ancestors were bad people. God forbid! Generally speaking, they were great Tzaddikim, much greater than us – but the Torah is teaching us to realize that we all err, and we all fall. But we can change and grow; we can defeat our enemies.

Each of us has tried so many times to change, only to fall right back down a short time later. The reason we are stuck is because we judge ourselves negatively. Our lack of progress and constant retreats confuse us into seeing our essence as bad and flawed. Our actions and thoughts are a mixture of good and bad, but our essence, our *neshamah*, is completely good and pure.

The secret to change is learning to identify ourselves by our *neshamos*. We have to realize who we really are. By discovering our good points and thanking God for them, we begin the process of finally transforming ourselves.

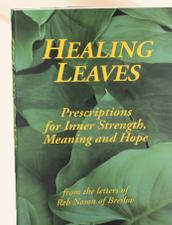
Dramatic progress is almost never experienced immediately. Therefore we need to find the little things, the things we might make light of, and feel happiness because of them. That smile that we shared with someone ... those few words of prayer that we concentrated on saying ... that temptation that we pushed away even for a few seconds. These are reflections of our *neshamah*. We must recognize them, identify ourselves with them, and feel great joy and gratitude for them. Rebbe Nachman said, “A little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness.” By connecting to our good and our *neshamos*, we are capable of restoring our dignified selves and recapturing our flag.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Nesiyat Kapayim 5:14  
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



It is inevitable that everyone will come up against many problems which are impossible to foresee. We have to accept them all with love and know that everything that happens to us is all for our good. (*Letter #151*)

# Rebuilding from the Ashes

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**ONCE THERE WAS** a devastating fire in the town of Breslov. Shortly after the conflagration, Reb Noson went with several other Breslovers to survey the damage. They saw a homeowner frantically digging through the ruins of his house. He was searching for anything that could be used in rebuilding his house. Any usable wood or metal was carefully set aside. Then the search continued.

“Do you see?” Reb Noson asked his companions. “Although this man’s house went up in flames, he has not given up on rebuilding. He is making every attempt to salvage whatever he can to start again. The same is true regarding spiritual matters. Even if a person feels as though he has completely failed and is ‘burned out,’ he should never give up hope. He needs to search out and collect every single good point buried within his negative actions and attitudes. In this manner, he will rebuild himself spiritually and truly return to God.”

\* \* \*

Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld was a very wealthy man. He appeared modern but was enthusiastic about spiritual matters since he was strongly committed to Rebbe Nachman’s path. Yet because of his many business concerns, he spent most of his time involved in money matters. When Rosh HaShanah rolled around, he felt devastated. “I made so much money this year, but what spiritual accomplishment was accrued? Compared to what I could have done, almost nothing. I was too involved in business!”

Then he spoke to Reb Avraham b’Reb Nachman. Whenever Reb Avraham spoke, his words penetrated deeply, like a powerful spiritual injection. The two of them spoke for a short while and Reb Yisrael Abba came away from the conversation a changed man. “He told me to be happy with the positive even if it’s meager, since a little is also good. He stressed Rebbe Nachman’s teaching that a little is also good and completely revitalized me.”

Reb Abba had a lovely family: children and grandchildren who moved to Israel and stayed faithful to the Torah. And it was all because he hung on and didn’t give up despite feeling discouraged.

*Based on Kokhvey Ohr, Anshei Moharan 29;  
Noam Siach II, pp. 115-116*

## SIDEPATH

*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l*

137. Rebbe Nachman told this story: Once there were two close friends who had recently married. The first one saw the other doing something improper but didn’t pay any attention to it, thinking it to be an accident. But when he saw his friend do something much worse, he realized that the other was actually a sinner. He decided to have nothing to do with his old friend.



After a while, each went out to earn a living. The sinner prospered, but his friend became very poor and was constantly upset, complaining of God’s injustice. He said to himself, “I know that my former companion committed a great sin. Why is he given such greatness and wealth?”

One evening the poor man had a vision. He saw a band of men approach carrying large sacks of coins. He tried to move towards them, but they stopped him with a warning: “Do not touch any of this money. It all belongs to your former friend.”

“Why is he worthy of these riches?” he asked. “I myself saw him commit a great sin!” They answered, “From the day you both went to earn a living, your companion has consistently set aside time for Torah. He committed himself to study a given amount each day without fail. But you are not involved in Torah. Consequently, your companion is worthy of riches despite his great sin. Although it can extinguish good deeds, sin cannot extinguish Torah” (*Sotah* 21a). “*Ve’ein Aveirah Mekabeh Torah* – Sin cannot extinguish Torah.” The first letters of the Hebrew words spell MAOT (money).



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*