

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Why Do We Sin?

By Yossi Katz

**YES, IT'S THAT** time of year again. Elul is upon us, and considering that we are seriously aspiring to engage in *teshuvah* (return to God), it may be high time to ask this fundamental question.

You're probably thinking the simple answer is that we sin because we just don't care, or at least we lack sufficient interest to do what the Torah deems proper. Wrong!

Shockingly, Reb Noson says that the majority of our wrongdoing actually comes about because we want too much, not too little.

Before God created our world, His Infinite Light filled all of existence. But God desired to make room for us and our freedom of choice. Therefore He created an Empty Space (so to speak), which gave us the room to "co-exist." This Empty Space allowed His Kingship to be affirmed even where He was most hidden – thus bringing about the ultimate manifestation of His greatness.

Each of us is considered a unique universe. Our personal "creation" includes both the Infinite Light and the Empty Space. The Infinite Light is our burning inner-desire to cleave to spirituality. We naturally demand perfection in our service of God. We believe we must perform acts of kindness or study Torah flawlessly. The desire to jump into a mitzvah or a new resolution and complete it with gusto stems from the force of our burning inner-desire.

But what starts as a noble enterprise often ends in failure. We intend to do some good deed, but invest too much of ourselves in it and end up feeling burnt out. Or the opposite—we desire to serve God with such perfection that we give up before we even try. We often feel a lack of interest in spiritual pursuits because we've set the bar too high, leading to the conclusion, "Why bother?" Then our potential energy gets misdirected and leads us to sin and to desire illicit things. Yes, we do have to burn with passion and desire to cleave to God, but this energy must be channeled the right way. How do we do that?

We must create an Empty Space within ourselves. An Empty Space is an inner-filtration system, a "cooling-off" place in which we can mitigate our burning, holy desire and harness its energy for good. An Empty Space allows us to grow step by step, with the patience necessary to endure a lasting, positive *teshuvah*.

As always, our guides in this endeavor are the Tzaddikim. The Torah illuminates everything, but not always do we understand its directives. Sometimes we focus on the wrong parts and take Torah teachings the wrong way. Therefore, Reb Noson compares God's Torah to the Infinite Light. We need the Tzaddikim to "filter" the Torah's messages to us, showing us the right way to follow it. The Tzaddikim can also teach us how to serve God with our burning inner-desire, while filtering our energy in a positive and efficient way.

As our *parashah* says, "You should not divert from the word they [the Tzaddikim] tell you, either right or left" (Deuteronomy 17:11). "Right" means rushing to do what is perceived as righteous and holy. "Left" means doing less than required, slacking off.

It's a delicate balance, but one that is crucial for our spiritual success. By growing in a measured way, we emulate the ultimate purpose of Creation. We aren't serving God while being blinded by His Infinite Light and lacking free will. Rather, we're enduring the filters of life's challenges and growing pains to reveal that all of Creation, including the necessary "breathing room," attests to His sovereignty.

As we begin to prepare for Rosh HaShanah and the coronation of the King, may we begin to truly see His loving hand in every detail of our lives. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Nedarim 3*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Whatever may be happening to a person at any time in his life, from his childhood right through his old age, he must use precisely *this* to come closer to God. (*Letter #339*)

# Borrow the Joy!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REB AHARON OF KIBLITCH** was a very happy person. He was so filled with joy that other chassidim envied him.

Despite his poverty, he was always happy. No surprise, then, that he was accomplished at bringing joy to a heavy heart. Usually only a few words from him were enough to transform gloom to joy.

He would often dance, celebrating his spirituality. When asked how he could always dance with such enthusiasm, he replied, "Well, naturally, at times the evil within accosts me and says, 'Why are you dancing? What do you have to be happy about now?'"

"I reply, 'Even if I really don't feel happy right now and can't find a reason to be happy at the moment, I can still borrow the joy. I know that in the Ultimate Future, there will be a lot to rejoice about. I dance because the joy I will have then is worth dancing about. Why shouldn't I borrow from that joy right now and express it in dance?'"

A certain poor bride and groom got married without a kopek to their names. They literally couldn't afford food for a festive meal. After the *chuppah*, the guests quietly left the premises. The couple was so devastated that they began to cry.

Someone raced to Reb Aharon and told him their tale of woe. "Is it that awful? What can we do?" he cried.

He rushed to raise money for them to serve a meal. As the food was being prepared, he began to dance. His dances were so wondrously joyous and alive that the couple began to rejoice, too. A crowd gathered to enjoy Reb Aharon's fancy footwork, and soon they were so caught up in his joy that they, too, started to celebrate and gladden the now happy couple.

On another occasion, someone asked Reb Aharon why he didn't attend the weddings of the wealthy and only went to celebrate with the poor. Reb Aharon answered, "It's only fair, my friend. The wealthy have money to buy meat and fish and other delicacies that bring joy to the bride and groom and all their guests. They don't really require my assistance. But at an affair that lacks fish, meat and delicacies, that's where I'm truly needed!"

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh V:215, 236, 238*

## SIDEPATH

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

152. I heard that the Rebbe once said, "One who is contentious in a previous life is reincarnated to be left-handed." The Rebbe hinted that this mystery includes the fact that the tribe of Benjamin is said to have contained seven hundred left-handed men.



153. Rebbe Nachman told us, "The only thing that inspires me is the fact that I was in the Land of Israel." He continued in this vein, saying that he knew absolutely nothing, that he was a simple *prustock*, and that his only inspiration came from his stay in the Holy Land. As he was talking about this, he started to explain this awe-inspiring topic: How, in his "ordinariness," he would inspire himself with "the road to the Land of Israel." And how, with that, he would give life to the ordinary people (*prustocks*), Torah students and scholars when they break from their studies, ordinary folk who are complete lowlifes, and even non-Jews who [also] need to receive life. All this is explained in *Likutey Moharan II*, 78.

154. I heard that the Rebbe once said, "My achievements came mainly through simplicity. I spent much time simply conversing with God and reciting the Psalms." This is how he achieved what he did. The Rebbe also said, "I have spoken with many great tzaddikim. They all said that they attained their high level through *prustick* – absolute simplicity. They would do the simplest things, secluding themselves and conversing with God. This is how they attained what they did. Fortunate are they!"



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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.*