

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## All in Good Time

By Yossi Katz

**IF I WERE TO** ask, “What is the secret cause of evil and sin?” what would you answer? Perhaps you would suggest lust, greed, or one of our many other base temptations. However, Reb Noson offers one basic catalyst: Time.

Our Rabbis teach that the evil inclination is only influential “in its time” (*Yerushalmi, Sotah 3.*) Beginning with the first sin – the eating of the forbidden fruit – the great Tzaddikim erred only because they acted based on a miscalculation of time. For example, had Adam waited until Shabbat, the forbidden fruit would have become permissible to him. It wasn’t that he was wrong about the great potential spiritual rectification brought about by eating it, but rather that the time was not yet ripe for his deed. And, as we know, his partaking of the fruit had disastrous ramifications.

Similarly, after twice being promised the land, Abraham asks God, “How will I know that I will inherit [the land]?” (Genesis 15:8). The Talmud (*Nedarim 32a*) identifies this specific query as being the root cause of the Egyptian exile. Now, Abraham was an awesome Tzaddik who introduced monotheism to the world. In fact, one need go back only two verses to see God complimenting Abraham for his tremendous level of belief. So how could Abraham have had such a quick reversal of faith?

Abraham foresaw that although his descendants would eventually conquer the Holy Land, they would be exiled from there. He perceived that for over two thousand years they would be persecuted, tortured and murdered while living in foreign lands. Therefore he “pushed” God to calculate and lay out at that very moment the exact plan for his descendants inheriting the land forever. Yet the time for revealing the final redemption had not yet come. The wondrous “grand finale” could not yet be revealed.

Though these episodes involved great Tzaddikim, the challenge of time affects us the same way. Life is very precious. Every moment affords us the opportunity to

connect with God. We were not put here simply to do and not to do. God breathed a *neshamah* (soul) into our bodies so we could experience Him even in the mundanity of the world. What stops us? Who wouldn’t take advantage of fostering a private relationship with the Master of the universe?

More than anything else, time stops us. God promised Abraham that he would inherit the land and that the redemption would eventually come. Similarly, we know that in the end, every Jew will receive his or her personal rectification. Each of us will merit eternal spiritual bliss. But when and exactly how this will happen is known only to God. We simply don’t know.

We do know that we can grow and experience a spiritual life by living in the present. By avoiding the pressure of constantly looking back at our failures, and the anxiety of trying to figure out how things will correct themselves in the future, we can live in the moment. We are free to connect to all of the goodness that is being offered to us right now. Doing so allows us to move forward and expedite the process that, yes, God will somehow finish. But first we must let go and establish true trust in Him; only then are we at liberty to discover our true, Godly essence.

Perhaps the only way this lesson could have been learned was by us being exiled in Egypt. Even though we were enslaved and completely subservient to the Egyptians, God demonstrated to us, before the entire world, that in the end He will take us out. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Gezeilah 5*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person must pay careful attention to every thought, word and event that comes his way every day, because God places Himself within them, as it were, sending each person different messages, appropriate to the time and place. (*Letter #37*)

# The Loyal Messenger

By Yehudis Golshevsky

There was once a king who wished to send secret messages to a fellow monarch, but the only route passed through a hostile neighboring kingdom. The enemy king was always on guard, fearing a conspiracy between his allied neighbors.

The king's first messenger was exceedingly wise. He passed through the enemy kingdom and never blew his cover; no one suspected a thing. The second messenger was less adept. He was questioned and almost arrested. Only his great physical prowess enabled him to escape captivity and certain torture. Unfortunately, the third messenger was neither wise nor strong, and he was apprehended.

It wasn't long before they began torturing him to extract what they suspected he knew. They promised him great reward if he would only divulge the message he had memorized. Despite the excruciating pain and their tempting offers, he held his tongue. The only thing they heard from him was that he was innocent, that he couldn't tell them what he didn't know. He was so immovable that his captors eventually decided he really must be innocent and let him go. He went on to deliver his message to his king's ally, and returned home.

The king and his court discussed which of these messengers deserved the greatest reward. Some said the first messenger was the most worthy, since he was so wise that he had eluded detection altogether. Others felt that the second man was the most commendable since, even after being captured, he had managed to escape.

But the king had a different view. "The third messenger is clearly the most deserving. He endured torture, knowing full well that any time he wished he could end it and be rewarded, yet he held fast. He is the one who will be most richly rewarded."

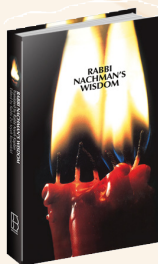
Rebbe Nachman taught that steadfastness is a more praiseworthy quality than natural wisdom and native strength. Both of the latter capacities are gifts; either you have them or you don't. But holding on in trying circumstances out of loyalty to the King is purely an act of will. And, as Reb Noson taught, "Your will is free." What you do with your will really proves who and what you are.

*Based on Maggid Sichos, p. 9*

## SIDEPATH

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

166. I heard that the Rebbe once said, "People think I am worthy of this great level because I am a great-grandson of the holy Baal Shem Tov. Nothing could be further from the truth. It came in another way completely, and through this I was worthy. My success came through just one thing."



167. The Talmud teaches, "Groaning breaks a man's body" (*Berakhot* 55b; *Ketuvot* 62a). The Rebbe said that this was precisely his experience. In his youth, while striving to serve God, he would spend much time sighing and groaning. He would then test himself to see if he could lift his hand. His body was so broken and subjugated that he could not do even this simple task.

168. The Rebbe also told us of his great shyness. He said, "I used to be so timid before God, I could literally feel the shame on my face. Often I would stand before God and feel embarrassed, as if I had been humiliated in front of a friend. There were times when I would actually blush, so great was my shame."

This shame was always visible on the Rebbe's face. No one had ever seen anything like it. The great tzaddik Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl once saw the Rebbe as a youth in Medvedevka. He said that on the Rebbe's face, we can see the literal meaning of the verse, "So that His fear will be on your faces, so that you will not sin" (*Exodus* 20:17).



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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.*