

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Rebbe's Letter

By Yossi Katz

**EVERY WEEK, A FEW** Breslov friends and I get together to discuss life in the light of Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Recently, while schmoozing, one friend asked the following question: "Which Breslov teaching would you choose to share with a close friend who has yet to taste from the wellsprings of Rebbe Nachman's Torah?" There seemed to be an almost unanimous agreement, something odd for a group of Chassidim who are each so unique. The answer: the lesson nicknamed "The Rebbe's Letter."

Unlike the majority of Rebbe Nachman's lessons, this teaching is reminiscent of a letter written to a friend. Here are some selections from this most inspiring text:

*When a person begins serving God, he is shown rejection. It seems to him that he is being pushed away from on high ... In reality, all distancing is nothing but being brought near. And so one needs very, very great encouragement to keep from dejection, God forbid, when he sees the passing of many, many days and years, and despite his great exertion in serving God, he is still very distant and has not in the least begun to enter the gates of holiness.*

*He sees that he is still riddled with crudeness and materialism, and with powerful, confusing thoughts. And whatever holy matter he wants to accomplish in the service of God, they thwart him. It seems to him as though God is completely ignoring him and has no desire whatsoever for his service, because he sees that he repeatedly screams and begs and pleads for God to assist him in his devotions, and despite this, he is still very, very distant ...*

*A person has to encourage himself very, very much and pay no attention whatsoever to all this, for in truth, all distancing is nothing but being brought near. And all the aforementioned happened to all the tzaddikim, as we heard explicitly from their mouths (Likutey Moharan II, 48).*

Our individual journeys through life, constantly seeking to arrive at greater spiritual heights, are reflected in Jacob's journey: "And Jacob left B'eer Sheva and went to Charan"

(Genesis 28:10). According to Kabbalah, B'eer Sheva (literally, "well of seven") represents the level of the seven lower *sefirot*. Jacob was leaving this place to ascend to a higher level. Yet precisely here, he faced *ChaRaN* (which is similar to *ChaRoN af* [Divine anger]), signifying the obstacles he faced before reaching his goal. Each time we attempt to rise to a higher level, we are met with daunting challenges. Often we mistakenly assume that we have made a wrong turn, or are simply unwanted.

Jacob understood that these obstacles were a tool of the Side of Evil, and held his ground. He strengthened himself with the knowledge that this is precisely the path to holiness. "He came upon the place" (ibid., 28:11). "The place" refers to God, who is called "the Place of the world." Through Jacob's knowledge that all distancing is nothing but being brought near, he was able to approach God.

"He lodged there because the sun had set" (ibid.). The setting of the sun represents a loss of intellect or spiritual perception. Jacob understood that he would be faced with darkness and spiritual loneliness because he wanted to ascend ever higher. However, he accepted this faithfully as a necessary "evil."

Our Rabbis say that the sun set supernaturally early on that day (*Chullin* 91b). This anomaly teaches that Jacob's loss of spiritual perception wasn't because he deserved it, but only because it was a necessary prerequisite for spiritual growth. God always desires our closeness and never pushes us away because of a lack of interest. If we feel distance, we must strengthen ourselves with the faith that this experience, too, will ultimately bring us near. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 11a-15b*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



We are obligated to give thanks for the past, for every bit of relief that God in His mercy gives us in our difficulties. (Letter #163)

# Speaking Before the King

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN TELLS** a parable:

Once there was a lord who had a very competent clerk in his employ. One day he sent this clerk to oversee a distant city within his fiefdom. When the clerk arrived at his post, however, he didn't mention the lord at all, and people got the impression that the clerk was in fact the lord. Whenever they needed something from him, they would fall at his feet and show him all kinds of honor. They would address him as "Your lordship," "Your munificence," and so on.

Once the lord himself came to the city to meet with the clerk and find out why people were not doing their appointed tasks. When the clerk summoned a supervisor to answer the lord's questions, the supervisor immediately bowed to the clerk and called him "Your greatness." When the lord began questioning him, the supervisor addressed his answers to the clerk instead. The supervisor spent much time flattering the clerk, imparting to him the honor that should have been accorded the lord. Naturally, the clerk's face turned black "like the bottom of a pot" from embarrassment. For there is no greater shame than this: that in the presence of the lord, they give *him* the honor.

Rebbe Nachman explains: The principal honor a man receives is due to the power of speech, for speech is the only thing that distinguishes man from animal. Speech corresponds to the Palace of God. When a person seeks honor through another's praise of him, or through his own speech to or about others, he is seeking honor in the King's Palace – honor that belongs to God, not to him.

Reb Noson adds that we should take care to use our speech specifically to honor God and righteous people (who, through their words and actions, reveal God to others).

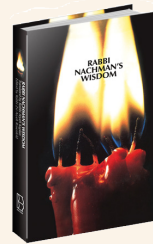
Perhaps this teaching contributed to the great respect that Breslover Chassidim accorded one another throughout the generations. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender recounted, "The care and sensitivity with which Breslovers treated each other is difficult to describe. They never said anything that could be construed as an insult or denigrating to their fellow in any way. They spoke with each other in a calm, tranquil manner, which is rare to find today."

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 194; Likutey Tefilot I, 132*

## SIDEPATH

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

178. Late one afternoon, I was standing before the Rebbe. He was looking out of the window with a look of deep longing in his eyes. He said, "What do I have to do in this world! But behold, the day passes and is soon gone." The Rebbe meant that what he had to do was beyond measure.



179. Before he passed away, the Rebbe said, "I have already reached such a level that I can no longer advance while still clothed in this earthly body. I yearn to put this body aside, for I cannot remain on one level."

Although the Rebbe attained the highest levels, he still strove to reach the next step. He finally reached so high a level that he could no longer advance while still in a mortal body. Therefore he had to leave this world. He said, "I would like very much to remove this garment. For I cannot remain on one level."

180. I once heard the following from the Rebbe: I saw a new angel today. I know his name and his deputies. These angels are all holding shofars. They first blow a long *tekiah*, then a staccato *teruah*, and finally another *tekiah*. These angels seek out lost things.

Many things are lost. This is because of desire. It is written, "*Ta'avot Resha'im Toved* – The desire of the wicked shall be lost" (Psalms 112:10). The mnemonic for *Tekiah*, *teRuah*, *Tekiah* is *TRT*, the same as the initial letters in this verse.



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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.*