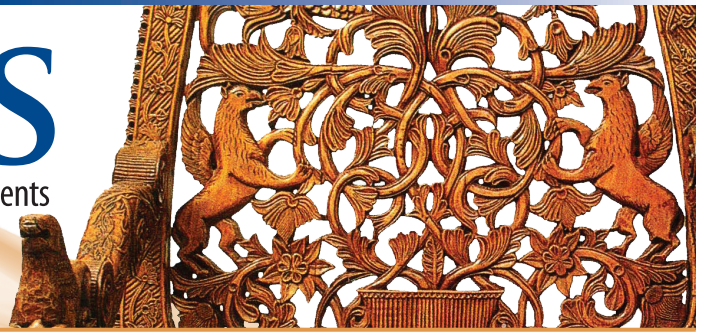


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYIGASH • 5775 • VOL. 5 NO. 10

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## Light in the Darkness

By Yossi Katz

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21**, was the official “winter solstice” — aka the shortest day of the year. Although summer isn’t quite yet around the corner, we have already lived through the greatest darkness. It’s no coincidence that the solstice took place during Chanukah. At the end of the month of Kislev, as the moon is at its smallest phase and the nights are so very long, we dared to light the menorah and demonstrate that God’s light is with us, even at the bleakest moment.

Being that Chanukah has now passed, we owe it to ourselves to ask, “Was there a message that can help get us through the cold winter months ahead?”

Picture the perfect day. It’s warm and sunny. You wake up well rested and give heartfelt thanks to God for restoring your special *neshamah* (soul). You begin the day with sincere prayer and inspirational Torah study. You are both productive and diligent at work while finding deep meaning and connection in everything you do and face.

When was the last time you actually had a day like that? Doesn’t the cold weather often seem to reflect how we feel deep down? Stuff comes up and it’s hard for us to focus. Life can make us utterly numb.

One of Rebbe Nachman’s basic teachings is the concept of *yeridah tachlit aliyah* (falling for the purpose of rising). This means that although we perceive we are spiritually falling, in actuality we are being prepared for our future spiritual ascent.

In this week’s *parashah*, Jacob has suffered for many years because he was under the impression that his beloved son Joseph had died. One day he receives word that reveals he’s been mistaken all this time. Joseph is alive and well, and is viceroy of Egypt! Jacob is jubilant, and desires to see his son immediately.

But he is also afraid. For Joseph lives in Egypt while Jacob resides in the Land of Israel. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim* (constrictions), alluding to the bitter

constraints of the exile. It is a place of darkness, a cloudy and cold place. Since hearing the good news, Jacob has been overjoyed and the prophecy that left him because of his depressed state has been restored. How can he now go “down” to Egypt? God assures him, “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you back up” (Genesis 46:4).

God is always with us, even when we feel that we are distant. Wherever a Jew goes, God comes too. Perhaps to us it looks like a cold and cloudy day, but we fail to see the sun behind the clouds. Only God knows what is best for us, and that what we perceive to be bitter and painful is actually therapeutic and healthy.

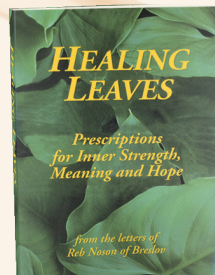
Moreover, God does not conceal Himself even for one extra second. Just as the moon, at its darkest moment, is really renewing itself so that it can wax full and bright in the nighttime sky again, so God acts with us. We think that it is too late, that things are too difficult, that we’ve made too many mistakes and the day has already been wasting. Don’t throw in the towel! Hold on just a little bit longer and you will discover that God has been with you the entire time, and that all of your difficulties were only paving the way for incredible spiritual growth and inner meaning. After all, we have already experienced the greatest darkness, and God was right there with us!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot V, p. 286-144a-288*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



You must fortify yourselves constantly to desire and yearn for God and for people who seek the absolute truth, until you are able to shatter all the remaining barriers and see the pleasantness of God.

(Letter #80)

# Weathering the Winter

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**FOR MOST OF US**, it's hard to imagine the level of deprivation that people suffered in Eastern Europe not so long ago. R' Chaim of Kiblich, a Breslover chassid, lived in a small home that didn't have heat. It was virtually a miracle that he and his family survived the icy Ukrainian winters.

Strangely enough, despite his poverty and insufficient winter gear, he never went into any house that had heating even when the opportunity arose. While most people went out of their way to get a little relief from the freezing temperatures, R' Chaim would wait outside even if the homeowner invited him in.

More than one person noticed his unusual behavior and wondered what could be behind it. Whenever he was asked, R' Chaim gave an answer that revealed a high degree of self-awareness and personal ethics.

"I can't afford to heat my own home. As you can imagine, our situation is very difficult; like most people, I would certainly appreciate a good thawing-out that could be achieved so easily by just stepping into my friend's heated home. But it is also forbidden to covet what other people have. I'm afraid that if I were to warm up in someone else's house, I'll have trouble keeping from feeling that I would give anything to live there. That's why I decline such invitations."



Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev was very devoted to his flock. Not only did he work hard to build and maintain their spiritual lives, he also worked to ensure that their material needs were met. He would often go around collecting food and other basic necessities that the poor required.

During one particularly brutal winter, he went around collecting wood for those who couldn't afford fuel to heat their homes. It was a matter of life and death, since in the low temperatures one could easily freeze. Once, after a making the rounds in Berdichev, he was heard to offer one of his famous prayers to the Almighty: "Master of the world! Everyone gave whatever wood they could. Now You give!"

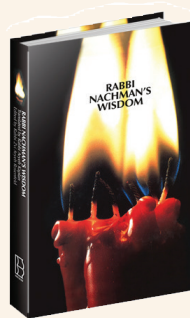
Astoundingly, the winter immediately became much more bearable. The spell of unusually mild weather lasted a full month.

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh IV:597, V:500*

## SIDEPATH

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

185. The Rebbe knew how to provide each person with a spiritual remedy based on the place where that person's soul was rooted. He might tell one person to fast at certain intervals. To another, he might prescribe undertaking a fast from Shabbat to Shabbat. To others, he would say that once a week, they should stay awake one night and abstain from eating animal products for twenty-four hours.



There was one course of study that was prescribed for all—the daily study of the *Shulchan Arukh*. The Rebbe said that even when a person has no time, he should still study at least one law in the *Shulchan Arukh* each day, no matter where that law might be. Another practice that he universally prescribed was for us to seclude ourselves in prayer each day—*hitbodedut*. He told us to express our thoughts before God

and ask that He have mercy and allow us to achieve true devotion.

No matter how simple the Rebbe's advice might seem, in practice it was always very difficult. It might involve a simple act, but it would be complicated by a host of distractions and frustrations. I heard the Rebbe say explicitly, "Everything I prescribe becomes very difficult." Even today, there are many obstacles in the path of one who studies the Rebbe's sacred works. Even if you know about the Rebbe and want to study his works, you will still encounter many obstacles. For the light is still hidden and eclipsed.



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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.*